



### Scent of spring

**Monrovia's** new Golden Crane Hydrangea (*Hydrangea angustipetala* 'MonLongShou Golden Crane') features large lacecaps of white and chartreuse. It not only presents its flowers in late spring, the earliest of all hydrangeas to blossom, but is highly scented, according to the company. Hardy in USDA Zones 6-10, this selection was made from seed collected in Southern Sichuan Province, China. It prefers rich, porous soil. Pink flowers will be maintained in neutral or alkaline soil with pH of 7.0 or higher, while blue flowers will be maintained in acidic soil with pH range of 5.5 or below. [Monrovia.com](http://Monrovia.com)

### Year-rounder

**Ball's** 'Jealousy' Leycesteria offers all-season interest, with chartreuse foliage and a big, bushy shape. Some blooms may appear in July, and cooler conditions express maroon highlights to the foliage. Purple fruit appears in the fall. It pairs well with other vigorous plants in large-size containers, and performs well in wetlands. [BallHort.com](http://BallHort.com)



### Gentle giants

The 'Red Fox XXL' series is comprised of large-flowered dahlias, boasting almost 6-in. diameter blooms. These large flowers grow on a plant that doesn't get out of control — nor will they need staking or extra care to maintain the plant structure, according to **Dummen USA**. The full-sun-loving annuals grow to heights between 10 and 24 in. The seven bloom color options include Veracruz (pictured), pink and white; Chiapas, intense pink; Rojo Paramo, red purple; Mayo, white; Durango, yellow; Hidalgo, copper; and Paraiso, pink. [DummenUSA.com](http://DummenUSA.com)



### Here come hummingbirds

The warm tones of the Agastache hybrid 'Summer Sunset' can brighten your summer borders and containers. The newest addition to **Terra Nova Nurseries'** Summer Series, this hummingbird mint is drought-tolerant, has an upright, compact habit, and blooms all summer, according to the company. Hardy to USDA Zone 6, it ranges from 10 to 24 in. in height and features 1.5-in. blooms.

[TerraNovaNurseries.com](http://TerraNovaNurseries.com)



### Pastel palette

*Rosa* 'Carding Mill' (Auswest) from **David Austin Roses** is a repeat-flowering shrub that grows to about 4x3.5 ft., thriving in areas of full sun or partial shade (USDA Zones 5-9). Featuring a myrrh fragrance, cupped blooms appear with approximately 80 petals in mixed shades of pink, apricot and yellow. This rose was named after a valley in the Long Mynd, a scenic area of hills and moors close to David Austin's display gardens in Shropshire, England. [DavidAustinRoses.com](http://DavidAustinRoses.com)

## The ticket to weed control

A client's desire for weed control leads Allan Cole to WeedEnder — and a profitable niche.

When Allan Cole's client asked him to control her weed problem, he found the perfect solution.



**W**HEN ALLAN COLE'S longtime client asked him to eliminate the weeds around her fenced-in property, it launched for Cole an add-on business.

Cole, who owns Willow Springs Nursery & Landscaping in Rubicon, WI, had been spraying around his client's fence annually, but the weeds returned year after year. While researching a better solution, Cole came across WeedEnder, a vegetation control-matting product by U-TECK. Made from post-consumer recycled materials, the green product prevents unwanted vegetation growth by depriving root systems of sun, yet it still allows water and nutrients to move through the fiber.

For Cole, it was the perfect solution.

"The client loved that it was made from recycled materials, and it also worked absolutely fantastic," recalls Cole of his first experience with the product. "It was really way above our expectations. I was so impressed that I called the company and asked about getting a distributorship... It has been an excellent fit for our business."

Though WeedEnder was developed for commercial use, the company is now pushing more into the residential landscape industry. U-TECK Vice President of Sales Russ Mason III says "never having to deal with weeds again" is a benefit homeowners can appreciate.

"You can use it in bed gardening," says Mason. "We can cut a series of holes into the sheet so you can plant bulbs through it. It not only kept weeds out of the beds, but it also helped keep the plants moist by reducing some of the evaporation."

### A SPRAYING ALTERNATIVE

Because spraying is often a component of many landscape companies' maintenance divisions, some professionals may be wary about selling a one-time product that promises to get rid of weeds forever.

But Cole has an answer for that.

"That part of the maintenance business may be starting to go away anyhow, as it becomes so heavily regulated," he says. "Pesticide or herbicide spraying, particularly in areas where children are present, is becoming banned or heavily controlled. The handwriting is on the wall. Now is the time to adopt a different solution."

For Cole, WeedEnder has been that solution. But the product's high cost deters potential buyers. Mason admits it's not cheap.

"It was first invented for use with the U.S. Department of Transportation for roadside weeds, so it had to be able to withstand the rigors of having tractors and mowers run over it," he explains. "It's incredibly tough. But making it nearly indestructible drove the cost of the product up. The typical homeowner might not be inclined to choose this product at first."

That's why having a landscape professional involved in the sale makes sense, Cole says, noting that his clients are more receptive to WeedEnder after being convinced of its long-term potential. It's an easier sell with municipal customers such as school districts, where pesticides often are the only weed solution.

"What I tell my homeowner and municipal customers is that there are no recurring costs," says Cole. "You never have to go out and spray or string-trim weeds again. In the long run, the product is a money saver. And it's good PR for places like schools, too. It doesn't look good having someone walk around with a sprayer when it's a place where kids play."

"I definitely think it's a good fit for the landscape industry," he concludes. "It's an easy business to move in to."

The author is a freelance writer with seven years of experience covering landscaping.

### » SERVICE SNAPSHOT

**WHY WEEDENDER?** "It's a great solution for people who are not happy with spraying herbicides. It becomes a great add-on service for those customers," Cole says.

**INVESTMENT?** "That's the great thing about the WeedEnder product. You have to pick up very few tools to start installing the product. A landscaper would already have most of the tools, and you can pick up some of the specialized tools from U-TECK. If not considering the advertising and strictly just the investment in tools, I'd say it's under \$2,000."

**LEARNING CURVE?** "The learning curve is the same as any other installation skill a landscaper learns, such as building retaining walls. You just need to pay attention to the specifications that U-TECK puts out, and you'll have an easy installation."

Stockner's Nursery is a third-generation family business based in central Virginia. Launched in 1981, Stockner's designs, installs and maintains landscaping and hardscaping and provides grounds management. It recently branched out to a retail extension, Twigs Garden Center, to complement its residential design/build division. Company president **Gary Stockner** discusses this interdepartmental synergy, as well as effective client communications, rising fuel costs and other challenges.



Gary Stockner, far right, and his management team plan to provide customers with more specialized services.

## INSIDE INFO

**Company:** Stockner's Nursery

**Headquarters:** Rockville, VA

**Employees:** 100

**2011 Revenue:** \$6.9 million

### Key to being a maintenance leader:

Communication is key in differentiating us from the competition. Employing a philosophy of being proactive vs. reactive is how we communicate with our clients. For example, we provide a monthly newsletter to communicate key information about company events and our role in the community. Our monthly field reports are an opportunity to stay connected to our clients by providing feedback to them on how their properties are looking. Our customer service satisfaction surveys allow our clients to communicate to us about how we are doing. All of these communication tools tie our communication and performance initiatives together.

Our clients have come to rely on us to tell them what we should perform, not what they think we should perform. This proactive attitude has presented us with many opportunities in the grounds management market and positioned us to increase our market share substantially — now and for the foreseeable future.

## TOP TRENDS

› **Go-Green initiating.** It's also known as "environmental responsibility" or "environmental stewardship." We are putting many resources into educating our clients on water-saving initiatives, best management horticultural practices and what we as a company are doing to recycle and reuse landscape waste by turning it into new byproducts. We maintain a strong commitment to corporate and environmental sustainability — not only for our clients' properties, but also for our own business practices.

› **Social media guru-ing.** Staying ahead of the curve in both the social media environment and technology is helping us to stay ahead of our competition in so many ways. This year, our attention will be focused on interacting with our existing client base and prospective clients via Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and the other usual suspects in social networking sites. We are offering time-lapse photography on our YouTube installation videos, demonstrating in a fun and unique way what we do and how we do it.

## TOP OBSTACLES

› **Rising fuel costs.** With a fleet of more than 50 vehicles and an array of landscape and construction equipment, fuel is becoming one of our major cost items. We've had to absorb the increase to remain competitive. To better manage our fuel usage, we recently installed GPS units on all our company vehicles. This allows us to more closely monitor our fuel usage by determining how we can improve our drivers' performance and minimize drive times on all our maintenance routes.

› **Competition pressures.** Costs continue to rise as margins continue to slim. There will always be the "low-ballers" and the national and regional players with which to contend. We remain

competitive with comparable companies of our size and revenue by focusing on who we are and what we deliver. Although we all sit at the same table, pitching the same line, it's all about who delivers quality and service consistently at a fair market price while maintaining the strongest relationship.

## TOP OPPORTUNITY

› **Specialization.** We are continuously looking at ways to create a market niche, to increase our opportunities and market presence. Our focus is on turning our global capabilities into specialized, niche brands under one corporate umbrella. We are branding each one of our service segments toward our targeted market.

Internally, we are looking at how each one of our service segments can support, and even grow the revenues and opportunities for each other. An example of this is how our residential design/build division interacts with our garden center/nursery. The design/build division is a "purchaser" of green goods from our nursery, which turns inventory and creates revenue for it; meanwhile, the nursery provides an avenue to market our design/build capabilities to prospective customers. To this end, we believe that this strategy and our core ideology of providing

exceptional customer service will continue to present us with opportunities for growth.

The author is a freelance journalist with more than 20 years' experience writing about the Green Industry. Contact him at [tcrcrain@goingrenguy.com](mailto:tcrcrain@goingrenguy.com)

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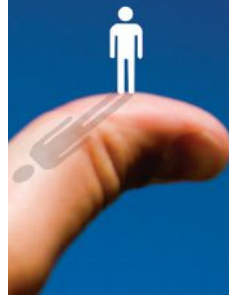
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### Get Growing

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LM contributor Jeffrey Knight says smart controllers can't compensate for a poorly designed and poorly installed irrigation system.

[ Coming in June ]

## THE LM150

Battling an erratic economy, tornadoes, floods and a mild winter, landscapers certainly took a wild ride in 2011. Read about which companies weathered the storm best, how they did it and what 2012-2013 has in store.



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# MYBIGGESTMISTAKE

LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY » BY CASEY PAYTON



## Knowing when to pursue a lead and when to back down has been beneficial for a New Jersey landscape business owner.

**D**REWE SCHOENHOLTZ, OWNER of The Green Scene in Hopewell,

NJ, says there's a delicate balance between sizing people up incorrectly and what he calls "chasing the wind." Finding that balance has come with years of experience in the business. But early in his career, it lost him some jobs — and valuable time.

"One of the biggest mistakes I made in my younger years was not giving clients a fair shake or the opportunity to find out what they want. I wrote them off over the phone," admits Schoenholtz. "That can happen when you've had a few bad experiences. It sours you moving forward, and you become wary of wasting your time on jobs that aren't going to work out. You think you know what people are going to say, and that you can tell who is or isn't going to be willing to spend money. But I've learned it's not quite that simple."

Over the years, Schoenholtz says, some of the clients he expected to be low-budget ended up being some of his best. So he has learned not to judge too quickly.

Still, Schoenholtz says he's wasted time pursuing jobs that never came to fruition.

"Even today, I get a lot of calls from out of town,"

says Schoenholtz. "I used to hop in my car and drive to the lead as soon as I could. I've learned how to get a sense of what the job entails over the phone. While you never want to write off a job too quickly, you can also get a sense of whether it's worth pursuing."

Schoenholtz has learned from experience when to give potential clients a chance and when to walk away. "I've learned to ask some very important screening questions during our initial phone conversation," he explains. "I always ask, 'What are you looking to do?' 'What is your time frame?' and 'What is your budget?' I didn't used to ask this up front, and I still find that most people don't want to talk about their budget on the phone. But I always explain that I'm just trying to get the best sense of what they want to accomplish. When someone is very reluctant to share details, it may be a warning sign the job isn't worth pursuing."

Many landscape business owners believe they have to chase hard after leads, but Schoenholtz has learned that his time is better spent pursuing jobs that are viable. "I've learned not to waste my time chasing the wind," he says. "Time is money. It's best to get a sense

up front whether a job is worth that chase."

But that's not to say Schoenholtz wouldn't accept smaller jobs. Early on, he learned a valuable lesson.

Schoenholtz used to go door-to-door looking for work. A client he secured that way asked him to do a small tree removal project. "We agreed that I would do it on a certain date for \$200," remembers Schoenholtz. "I showed up when I said I would, and charged the amount I originally set. The client was impressed. He said most people don't show up when they say they will, don't do the work they set out to do, and then charge more in the end."

The client then inquired about a small job of planting some bushes. Again, Schoenholtz showed up when he said he would, performed the job, and charged what he'd said he would charge.

"The client then told me that those first two jobs were an interview and he was ready to give me my real job," recalls Schoenholtz. "It was an \$85,000 job. This was more than 30 years ago, so that was a really big job. It was the perfect example of not writing a job off too soon."

Over the years, Schoenholtz says, "I've tried to keep that lesson with me as I look for the right balance in pursuing leads."

Payton is a freelance writer with seven years of experience covering landscaping.



Drewe Schoenholtz learned early on not to judge potential clients too quickly.

**COMPANY:** The Green Scene

**HEADQUARTERS:** Hopewell, NJ

**YEAR FOUNDED:** 1974

**NO. OF EMPLOYEES:** 14

**SERVICE BREAKDOWN:** 50% garden construction (hardscaping, walls, walkways, pergolas, etc.); 35% landscaping; 10% trees; 5% koi ponds

**CLIENT BREAKDOWN:** 80% residential; 10% commercial; 10% industrial



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