

# Smart communication

A look inside a successful Smart Irrigation Month marketing campaign. *By ERIC HORVATH*

The Toro Co. is the manufacturer winner of the 2012 Smart Marketing Contest. We spoke with Mike Baron, Toro's national specifications manager, to learn more about how to successfully communicate the tenets of Smart Irrigation Month.

**Q:** Toro's 2012 Smart Irrigation Month efforts included reaching out to diverse audiences, including contractors. Describe Toro's approach to promoting Smart Irrigation Month to them.

**Mike Baron:** While contractors are not monolithic by any stretch of the imagination, they do share something in common: they have direct contact with property owners, property managers and their irrigation systems. In a real sense, contractors are the gatekeepers for both innovative technology and evolving best practices.



Mike Baron

**Q:** So while contractors are an important piece, it is incumbent on the industry as a whole to participate in Smart Irrigation Month promotion?

**Baron:** Contractors are a strategic constituency for promoting Smart Irrigation Month because of their unique relationships with property owners and managers. But a singular focus on only contractors would be much less effective than a coordinated effort. That being said, it's important to remember that contractors influence distributors because that's where they buy their products. There is a synergy that multiplies effectiveness and speeds market adoption when a manufacturer communicates effectively with both the selling distributor and the buying contractor.

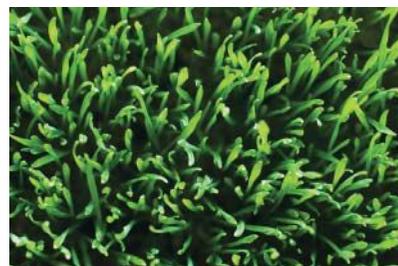
**Q:** Toro has won the Smart Marketing Contest manufacturer category twice. Do you have any advice for how other manufacturers and contractors can put together similarly successful campaigns?

**Baron:** Any manufacturer, regardless of size, should ask itself, "How important is the future availability of water to my business?" If water availability is important, then the next question is, "How has that fact been integrated into strategic planning?" Take that information and then think about the primary message being communicated by the IA through the Smart Irrigation Month initiative.

Leverage that message, and what the IA is doing, in ways that help achieve the goals in the strategic plan that are affected by future water availability. The key piece of advice: Don't force it! Make promoting Smart Irrigation Month complementary to and reinforcing of your strategic plan, marketing and sales efforts.

For contractors, the recommendation is to use the same concepts as stated for manufacturers, but adapt it to what's cost effective—especially if you're participating for the first time. Start small, easy and cost effective. During July, you will start to see opportunities for enhancements appear as if by magic. Keep a file and jot down notes. That file will serve you well for next year. And of course, take advantage of the many graphics offered online by the Irrigation Association. Their support gets better every year.

*Horvath is communications manager for the Irrigation Association.*



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## LAWN/TREE CARE

# It's bed time

Landscape bed weed control is an attractive service opportunity, says one LCO.

By MARISA PALMIERI

Lawn care companies that haven't yet embraced the business opportunity of landscape bed weed control should rethink their decision not to provide this service. So says Phil Fogarty, owner of Crowley's/Weed Man of Euclid, Ohio, which has a 90 percent renewal rate for bed weed control program.

There are a few reasons why he called this service area a "tremendous opportunity" for lawn care operators (LCOs) during a webinar *Landscape Management* hosted in April, sponsored by Valent Professional Products. These include the advantages of serving a niche, offering high-quality services and customer satisfaction.

In Fogarty's area, other lawn care companies don't market weed control in both turf and landscape beds, so it's an advantage for Weed Man to offer both.

"There aren't other lawn care companies customers can call to get both services done at the same time," he says.

Quality control is one of the biggest advantages to taking care of both services.

"The customers we're doing lawn care and bed weed control for, we have fewer service calls on both sides because we have control over both," Fogarty says, explaining there's less movement of the weeds between the beds and the turf. "We've become irreplaceable for these customers."

### SELLING IT

When it comes to adding this service, Fogarty recommends selling the bed weed control as recurring service that's part of a program.

Due to preemergent herbicide application costs and the labor that may be required on the first visit for this service, an LCO is going to spend more money on the front end than later in the year.

"You want to prevent the customer from taking just one application," he says. For example, his company's bed weed control program typically includes four visits per year at an annual rate of about \$400 for a 1,500 sq ft to 2,000 sq ft lawn. Fogarty emphasizes that prices vary.

The best time to add new bed weed control clients is in the summer.

"It's easy in June and July when you see people with big weed problems and can tell they haven't gotten ahead of it," he says. "A well placed phone call or flier in the door can work very well."



Phil Fogarty

To market to existing clients, Fogarty suggests using any potential customer touch points to promote the service. "Just giving someone a bill is wasting a great sales opportunity," he says. "That contact with the customer is a natural opportunity to remind them of other things you do."

Setting expectations upfront with customers is very important.

"There's going to be a weed from time to time," Fogarty says, adding his company instructs customers to alert the office for a free service call when that happens. Why? Some weeds like nutsedge get worse when customers pull them versus letting a technician treat them with glyphosate.

### UP AND RUNNING

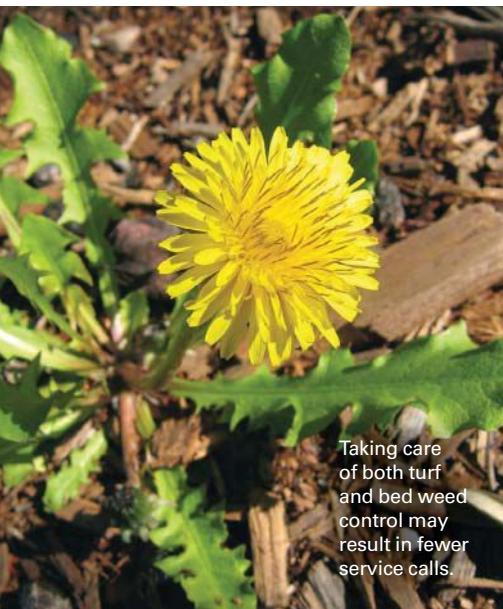
Staffing is crucial when it comes to adding bed weed control, Fogarty says, noting the knowledge base and techniques are different from treating lawns. Having a technician with ornamental plant knowledge is vital because some perennial plants may be easily confused with weeds.

"You can't send your average guy out there," he says. "You need someone with knowledge and experience."

For example, spraying bed weeds is different from spraying weeds in turf—applicators must take care not to overpressurize sprayers or glyphosate may come in contact with trees, shrubs, perennials or annuals, he says. Another tip is to train applicators to put themselves between what they're spraying and what plants they don't want to be exposed to a control product, to act as a shield.

Similarly, Fogarty recommends keeping a separate route, truck and equipment for bed weed control due to the possibility of mixing up products or other risks.

"You don't want someone walking across a lawn without changing their shoes and you don't want backpack sprayers, hoses and tanks going back and forth," he says. "Our equipment is sequestered." **LMM**



Taking care of both turf and bed weed control may result in fewer service calls.



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# PROJECT PORTFOLIO

A SCRAPBOOK OF DESIGN/BUILD OVERHAULS

*Room for a view*

## THE MISSION

Incorporate outdoor living space and provide more opportunities to showcase the views of the Bay.

This San Francisco Bay property was at one time part of a larger estate with some historical significance. The landscape project began midway through a major renovation to the primary residence, which itself was added years before with a more modern, contemporary design than its neighbors. It was that design style, and the need for additional outdoor living space, that provided the basis for the landscape design concept.

The team consisted of David Thorne Landscape Architect, Oakland, Calif.; Gardeners' Guild, Richmond, Calif.; the owner/architect; and the general contractor. Kip Matthews, operations manager of Gardeners' Guild's construction division, notes that BCP Concrete, Pleasanton, Calif., and Above The Rest Builders, San Rafael, Calif., went "above and beyond" to make this project a success.

"There were a few challenges," admits Matthews, "including narrow streets, neighbor coordination and a wet winter."

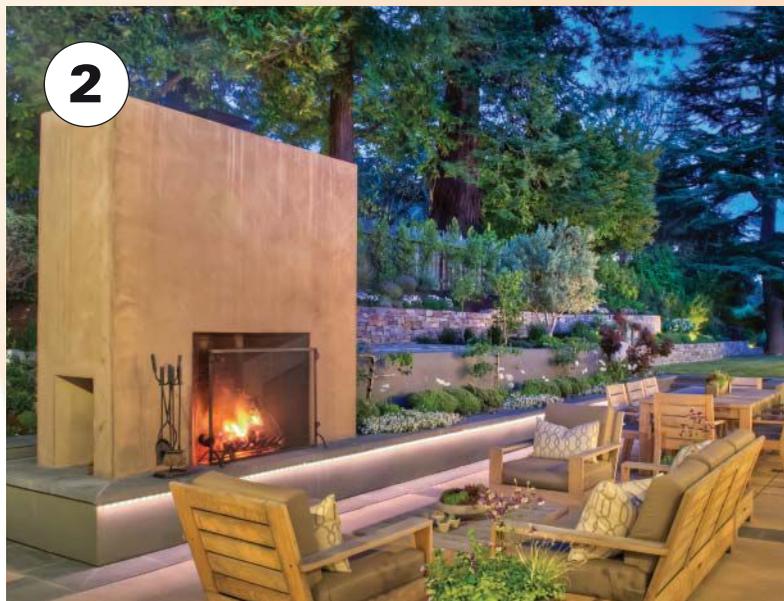
But the team met and overcame these obstacles, he adds, and success soon followed.

"Concrete stairs, walls and balustrades from the original estate were removed and terraces cut to capture much of the sloping hillside, creating additional usable space," he explains. "Ledge stone and CMU/stucco retaining walls were constructed. Turf areas for the kids were added, as well as planting areas with specimen olive trees, perennials, annuals and vegetables from various patios and sun decks."

Matthews notes that engineered footings, piers, sub-slabs and grade beams "provide a solid foundation where necessary. A water-efficient irrigation system, extensive drainage system, and other required utilities were provided to energize and sustain all the elements and functions related to the project."



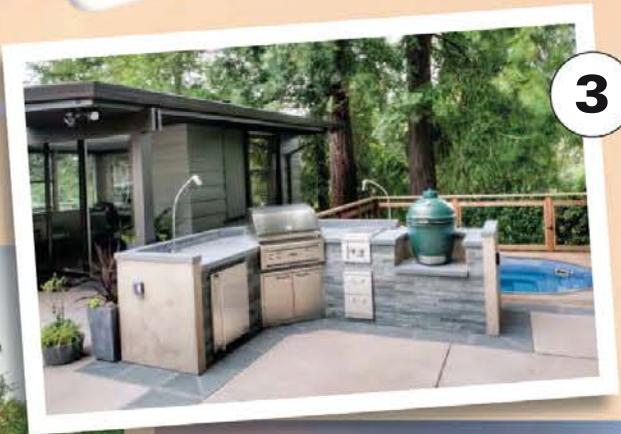
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PHOTOS: TREVE JOHNSON PHOTOGRAPHY

## THE WORK



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**1 | A welcoming walk.** The concrete grand staircase entry to upper levels from the driveway and property entry. A specimen *Acer* tree anchors the front entry planting area.

**2 | The great outdoors.** The further end of the turf area shows a custom design/build water feature, concrete patio, fireplace sitting area and kitchen area.

**3 | Hidden spa.** Adjacent to the fireplace is the outdoor kitchen/barbecue area, complete with a Big Green Egg smoker. Behind the kitchen is a secluded spa inset in another deck, cantilevered off a slope. Extensive site and underground work accompanied this portion of the project.



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**4 | Retaining elegance.** The view from the top of the grand staircase, looking at the back of the residence. Note the Ipe deck and suspended bridge from the house with clear redwood and black poly-coated welding wire railings. The midlevel turf area is retained by a CMU/stucco wall with a bluestone cap. Upper levels are supported by dry-stacked ledgerstone walls.

**5 | Garden of paradise.** The view from the upper sun deck, with plantings such as fruitless olive trees, herbaceous perennials, vegetables and fruit and citrus trees.

**6 | Water wonder.** This custom water feature can be enjoyed from the front porch. The vertical piece is a broken basalt column with a cut and polished basalt base.



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*Founded in 1972, Gardeners' Guild is an employee-owned landscape management company with experience maintaining and building both commercial and residential landscapes throughout the San Francisco Bay area. Learn more at [GardenersGuild.com](http://GardenersGuild.com).*



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## In store

With seasonal containers, a Virginia-based landscape firm finds work styling the exterior of a boutique.

**W**HEN A HIGH-END clothier showed interest in a new storefront plant display, it led to a new account for Kane Landscapes, a Potomac Falls, Va.-based landscape company. While it was the company's first seasonal color change-out job for a commercial client, the mostly residential company found enhancing storefronts is similar to performing container gardening services for homeowners.

The entire project came about when landscape designer Amanda Hamilton was attending a professional networking meeting and met a fellow attendee whose father owned a high-end boutique. He was looking for a way to make his storefront pop. While the upscale shopping center already had a landscape company handling plant change-outs in common areas, the shop owner was looking for something that would set it apart.

"When they came to us, they just wanted new urns and new plant material, but we talked to them about doing bimonthly change-outs that coordinated with the store's advertising or the changing seasons," Hamilton says. "They signed on for us to come back every other month. They give me some idea of what color they like, but I pretty much have free reign on the design, which has been fun for me."

Hamilton says it takes approximately an hour for her and another manager to do the actual plant change-out, so she accounted for that time plus design time when she priced the job. She also set a bimonthly budget of \$300 for the material itself.

Instead of discarding the old, brown urns that were previously used for the storefront, Hamilton says she cleaned them up and installed interior plant material. The urns now are on display inside the store. A store employee is responsible for watering both the indoor and outdoor containers.



Containers make this entryway shine. Kane Landscapes workers change out plants to reflect the season.



Adding this service didn't require much investment because Kane already handled residential container gardens and had the necessary tools.

The biggest difference for this job involves transporting the materials to the site.

"We got a little cart where we can wheel all the material to the storefront," Hamilton says. "This is a large outdoor shopping area and we have to walk down several corridors to get to the store. It was very important that we didn't make a mess on any of the walkways."

To contain dirt, Hamilton says, workers put out tarps when they perform the change-outs. "Handling a storefront as opposed to a residential property definitely required a little more caution in containing the mess," she says.

Because Hamilton's networking group meets only a few doors down from the storefront, she occasionally stops to check on the plants. "It's definitely not a display that requires a lot of upkeep," Hamilton says. "It's been fun to get creative in picking out the plant material and coordinating it with what the store has going on."

The store has been happy with its new storefront designs. In fact, it recently renewed its contract with Kane Landscapes.

"This is the first time we've done a storefront like this, but if more work came from it, it's certainly something we'd like to do," Hamilton says. "While we've been working, shoppers have stopped and asked what we're doing or commented that it looks nice, so it may bring future work."

Payton is a freelance writer with eight years of experience writing about the landscape industry.



Containers add color to an entry.

### >> SERVICE SNAPSHOT

**COMPANY:** Kane Landscapes.

**LOCATION:** Potomac Falls, Va.

**SERVICE:** Storefront seasonal containers

**PRICING:** Materials and time for design and installation.

**BIGGEST CHALLENGE:** Mid-winter is a difficult time to do a container garden because there's limited plant material to choose from. Landscape designer Amanda Hamilton says evergreen grasses and colorful cabbage are one way to retain color.

**BEST TIP:** "When it comes to container gardening, I use the 'filler, thriller, spiller' rule," Hamilton says. "Thrillers are the main attraction, while the fillers complement it without overshadowing. The spiller would be a trailing plant that spills over the sides for added interest."



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## BECAUSE GREEN MATTERS.

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## WORKING TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.

Together with key industry partners, Project EverGreen has established the following programs to help make a greater impact, sooner:

### GreenCare for Troops SnowCare for Troops

- Project EverGreen connects military families with lawn and landscape companies, as well as snow removal companies to receive free services while their loved one is serving overseas.
- More than 3,500 contractor volunteers and 12,000 military families have signed up for GCFT, while 1,100 contractor volunteers and 1,500 military families signed up for SCFT.
- These popular programs have garnered attention on TV and in newspapers across the nation including Mike Rowe's *Dirty Jobs* and NBC's *Nightly News*.



### Community Based Revitalization Projects

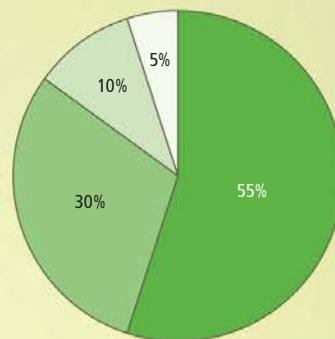
- Focused community revitalization and renovation projects across the United States encourage industry professionals, consumers and anyone who's passionate about healthy green spaces to work together to improve their city and surrounding areas.
- Over the last seven years, our message has made a positive impact in: Akron, Ohio; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Greensboro, Raleigh and Charlotte, North Carolina; Ft. Myers, Florida; Toronto, Canada; and San Antonio, Texas.
- Maintained green spaces generated community engagement, involvement and communication among residents, city leaders and visitors.

### GreenCare for Youth

- By reaching out to children of all ages, we can create a greener tomorrow.
- The Art of Green Spaces Competition, sponsored by Birds and Blooms, encourages students to use all forms of art to share how they feel about the green spaces in their lives.
- Golf bag tags, featuring messages on the benefits of green spaces, are given to participants of the GCBAAs Sticks for Kids program.
- Youth sports field renovations make playing surfaces better and safer.

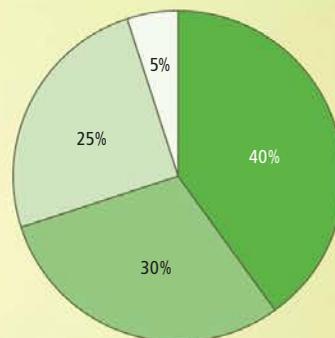
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- Individual contributions (5%)



## HOW YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS ARE UTILIZED.

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## TURF PRODUCTS



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**Majestic Green** // [MajesticGreen.org](http://MajesticGreen.org)

### Square Foot Advantage Calculator

Calculate your fertilizer cost savings with the Square Foot Advantage Calculator. This easy-to-use online calculator will take you through the steps to compare the total cost-in-use of what you're currently using to a single application of Spread It & Forget It. For a more in-depth comparison, contact your distributor and proceed through the calculations together.

**Agrium** // [DrivenByDuration.com](http://DrivenByDuration.com)



### CoverGrow mulch pellets

CoverGrow can be applied by hand or spreader, or sprayed hydraulically. It mixes easily, even in jet-agitated hydroseeders, where it goes quickly into suspension. Once activated by water, the mulch pellets quickly expand in size and disperse to provide greater coverage and a stronger protective cover. A 40-lb. bag yields 50 lbs. of coverage.

**Profile Products** // [ProfileCoverGrow.com](http://ProfileCoverGrow.com)

## INSECTICIDES



### Insecticide line

Manufacturing capabilities combined with advanced formulation technologies allow Quali-Pro to deliver an array of insecticides that treat most soil-inhabiting pests in turfgrass and landscape plantings.

**Quali-Pro** // [Quali-Pro.com](http://Quali-Pro.com)

### Merit insecticide

Featuring a comprehensive offering of pack sizes and formulations, including tree injections, Merit provides the industry's longest-lasting grub control, according to the manufacturer. It also offers residual control of numerous ornamental pests. Merit's broad-spectrum, systemic action delivers preventive and curative results at usage rates up to 96 percent lower than many registered soil insecticides.

**Bayer** // [BackedByBayer.com](http://BackedByBayer.com)





### Talstar Professional insecticide

Running now through Nov. 30, 2013, the "Buy Three Get the Fourth Free" promotion is for 0.75- and 1-gal. jugs of Talstar Professional liquid insecticide. It's used on more than 75 pests, including billbugs, chinch bugs, fleas, ticks, stink bugs and all species of ants. It contains no odorous or plant-damaging solvents—and, once dry, it's difficult to tell where it was sprayed.

**FMC Professional Solutions** // [FMCproolutions.com](http://FMCproolutions.com)

### Caravan G insecticide/fungicide

This insecticide/fungicide is a broad-spectrum combination product, delivering the disease control of Heritage G fungicide and the insect control of Meridian 25WG insecticide. Depending on application timing and geography, one application can yield season-long grub control—and up to one month of preventive brown patch control. This ready-to-use product comes in a 30-lb. bag with an easy-to-close zipper seal.

**Syngenta** // [GreenCastOnline.com](http://GreenCastOnline.com)



### DuoCide insect control

DuoCide provides a preventative and curative treatment to control ticks, grubs, fire ants, mole crickets, European crane flies and more. Similar in cost to other single-mode insecticides, the product combines carbaryl and bifenthrin into an exclusive multi-mode formula that enhances performance both above and below the surface.

**The Andersons** // [AndersonsInc.com](http://AndersonsInc.com)



### Safari insecticide

Available in two formulations, Safari is a super-systemic insecticide with quick uptake and knockdown. It controls a broad spectrum of pests, including Q- and B-biotype whitefly, Hemlock woolly adelgid, emerald ash borer, mealybug, mountain pine beetle 2(ee), leafminer, fungus gnat, black vine weevil, glassy-winged sharpshooter and more.

**Valent BioSciences Corp.** // [Valent.com](http://Valent.com)

### MistAway Systems outdoor misting systems

MistAway is a manufacturer of automated outdoor misting systems for control of mosquitoes, spiders, no-see-ems and other insects. During the last five years, its dealers have installed more than 13,000 systems in the U.S. and abroad. The company is actively seeking landscaping professionals to sell, install and service the systems in markets across the country.

**MistAway Systems** // [MistAway.com](http://MistAway.com)

## HOLIDAY DESIGN

### PRO Landscape software

This software allows you to create visual holiday lighting designs. Using a photograph of your customer's house or building, you can draw light strings and icicle lights, and show holiday displays. The holiday lighting is tied to the estimating, users can quickly create a bid for your work.

**PRO Landscape by Drafix Software** // [PROLandscape.com](http://PROLandscape.com)



### LED 3-Channel chasing lights

Create custom Christmas light displays with amazing effects with the Versaline LED 3-Channel Chasing Light System. Choose from a variety of string types to mix and match together, and link them all in one complete system. EnvironmentalLights.com also offers complimentary design advice and professional pricing discounts.

**EnvironmentalLights.com** // [EnvironmentalLights.com](http://EnvironmentalLights.com)



## LIGHTING OPTIONS



### Brick Step Lights

Nora's new LED Brick Step Lights are the size of a standard brick (8 5/8 x 3 15/16 x 3 in. deep), and can be installed in brick walls, patios, walkways and steps. Each light features 24 LEDs for even illumination and consumes just 4W of power for energy savings. The 120V units have an integral driver for wet-labeled applications, and can be installed inside or outdoors.

**Nora Lighting** // [NoraLighting.com](http://NoraLighting.com)



### G-Lux Plug n' Play series

This LED Landscape Lights series includes accent lights, path lights, underwater lights, in-ground lights, and accessories. They can be integrated quickly into existing systems. The company notes that the series is designed with LED technology that's 80 percent more efficient than other bulb types and lasts eight to 10 times longer with less maintenance.

**Super Bright LEDs** // [SuperBrightLEDs.com](http://SuperBrightLEDs.com)

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### MR-16 LED lamps

Professionals can use these new, patent-pending lamps to upgrade existing landscape lighting installations to the energy-saving benefits of LED. Designed and built in the U.S., the lamps are available pre-installed in all of Vista's fixtures that currently use an MR-16 Halogen Lamp.

**Vista Professional** // [VistaPro.com](http://VistaPro.com)



### Model 114 path light

This new LED-ready path-light is available in copper or architectural bronze finish. It's equipped with a halogen JC bi-pin lamp and also accepts an LED bulb.

The LED lamp delivers 1.6W of illumination, equivalent to 10W incandescent. Durable GS-10 spikes are included, and a brass-finished swivel and key connect the shade to the stem.

**Orbit Industries** // [OrbitElectric.com](http://OrbitElectric.com)