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Learning to (yard)walk



Yardwalking is a stand-alone educational service, not a sales tactic.

WHEN TALKING ABOUT horticulture, Tom Strangfeld is a natural at addressing crowds. The independent landscape designer and horticulturist has lectured at Boston's Arnold Arboretum and appeared on "This Old House," to pick a few bullet points from his resume. But a few years ago he got the urge to teach in a more intimate setting to give people more individual attention. He's been conducting "yardwalks" ever since.

Dubbed by his wife as yardwalking, Strangfeld describes the service as "private horticultural instruction" with homeowners in their yards. Homeowners choose from one of three topics—planning, pruning or planting—and, at a price tag of \$95 per hour, Strangfeld walks the property with them, teaching how to properly care for their landscape. The service offers homeowners his 40 years of experience in one, concise meeting that's directly tailored to their needs.

Strangfeld estimates he's performed about a hundred yardwalks, although he essentially has been doing it as an initial design consultant for most of his career.

He notes some key differences between yardwalking and an initiation site meeting. The biggest one is yardwalking is not a service meant to lead to a sale. It's completely focused on education, providing the homeowners with the information to oversee their own properties.

"You cannot go into this looking to sell a job because that's not what it's about," Strangfeld says. "You need to focus on the client and what they need. They'll be able to tell if you're turning it into a sales pitch and then they'll wonder why they're paying for it."

While this sometimes means sacrificing "trade secrets," Strangfeld says that's OK because, essentially, that's what the homeowner is paying for versus someone else doing the work. To that end, ideal yardwalk clients are "do-it-yourselfers," he says. Thus, it's a bonus if those homeowners do turn into design

clients—and 10 percent to 20 percent of them eventually do, Strangfeld says.

"I think the fact that I go there as a teacher and not a salesman actually helps me get more jobs," he says. "And if I don't, I'm fine with that because it wasn't why I was there."

Strangfeld markets the service mostly through his speaking engagements at garden clubs and on his website, but this year he's considering targeting a few communities with a direct mail program or local newspaper advertising. Last fall, he caught quite a bit of business after an article ran in *The Boston Globe* about yardwalking. Several months thereafter he was doing five to eight yardwalks per week.

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

PROFESSIONAL: Tom Strangfeld

LOCATION: Wayland, Mass.

SERVICE: Yardwalking

WHY: To share horticultural knowledge with homeowners to help them improve their landscapes independently.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: Marketing. While Strangfeld has gotten the word out through teaching and an article last year in *The Boston Globe*, he has time for more clientele. "I can't drive by a home without wondering how I could help them," Strangfeld says.

BEST TIP: It's not just about talking. "I spend a lot of time listening to what the client has to say," Strangfeld says. "Then I repeat what they said back to them to make sure I understood it correctly (and so) they know I'm listening."

WHAT IT TAKES

Although offering yardwalking has a low barrier to entry, with no new equipment required, Strangfeld says it's not a fitting add-on for every landscape professional because clients are paying for knowledge. With Strangfeld, for instance, they're paying for his four decades of experience, plus his knack for teaching.

"You need to have the ability to talk to people," he says. "It's like being able to hold an ongoing conversation at a cocktail party. You also need to have a fairly even temper and be an overall pleasant person. You have to be fully engaged."

It also requires the ability to understand a landscape within minutes of getting on the property, Strangfeld says.

"I'm coming onto a property and have no previous knowledge of what's there or what I'll see," he says. "One of my favorite things about the business has always been my ability to be dropped into a landscape from outer space and understand it right away. That's a necessary skill for yardwalking."

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

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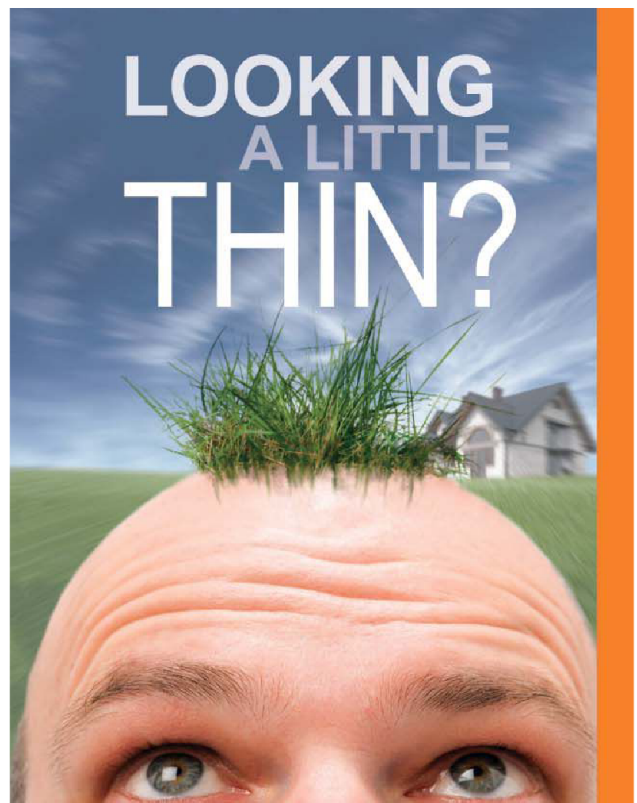
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LM REPORTS

YOUR GUIDE TO PRODUCT RESEARCH

MOWERS



QuikTrak M series

The new QuikTrak M series of stand-on, zero-turn mowers—the 636M, 648M and 652M—offer a lightweight, compact footprint for easy maneuverability. The series is available with 36-, 48- or 52-in. (pictured), 7-gauge fabricated floating steel decks. In addition to flat-free front tires and sealed front caster bearings, the mowers offer a quick height of cut adjustment and a two-year, unlimited hour commercial warranty.

John Deere // JohnDeere.com/MowPro



Stander ZK

The Stander ZK has deck widths of 52 and 61 in. and engines up to 31 hp. Decks are deeper; wheels are larger; fuel capacity is greater than the traditional Stander, and the ZK can mow at speeds up to 13.5 mph. It's also equipped with Wright's Rapid Height Adjustment, which lets the operator raise or lower the cutting height without getting off the mower.

Wright Manufacturing // WrightMfg.com



Mower attachment

The Bobcat front-mounted mower attachment cuts grass before it's driven over, allowing improved working visibility of the area to be mowed. The frame design allows the mower to oscillate independently to follow uneven terrain. It's available in 71.5- and 89.5-in. cutting widths to mow everything from roadside ditches to large acreages.

Bobcat Co. // Bobcat.com/attachments/mower



Propane Mower Incentive Program

PERC continues its Propane Mower Incentive Program in 2014. Landscape professionals can receive \$1,000 toward the purchase of qualifying propane mowers or \$500 toward eligible conversions of gasoline- or diesel-powered mowers. Data collected through the program is used for new product development.

Propane Education & Research Council // PoweredByPropane.org

Rear-mount mowers

Kioti rear-mount mowers are designed to mount to any tractor and float to follow uneven contours. Each mower is built with heavy-duty steel to meet Kioti's quality standards. Ranging from 60 in. to 84 in., the mowers offer the ability to navigate any terrain, the company says.

Kioti // Kioti.com



Altoz

With a top speed of 19 mph, the 2014 Altoz XC Z line of zero-turn mowers features the Aero Deck High Output System and Gator Mulcher G6 blades. The line, which includes the XC 720 Z (pictured), XC 610 Z and XC 540 Z models, also offers the SmarTrak Monitoring System, a digital RPM gauge, alarm protection and an on-board clock.

Altoz // Altoz.com



Lazer Z X-Series

Exmark expanded the availability of its exclusive RED on-board intelligence technology to Lazer Z X-Series models with 52-in. UltraCut Series 6 cutting decks. Sixty- and 72-in. cutting decks are also available. RED technology is designed to provide increased durability with an exclusive clutch saver feature and intelligent monitoring of vital engine parameters such as engine temperature and oil pressure.

Exmark Manufacturing // Exmark.com

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Z Master Professional 5000 series

The Toro Z Master Professional 5000 series has two new models with rear discharge decks. Featuring Toro's Turbo Force cutting deck with 7-gauge steel, cast iron spindle housings and high-strength steel blades, the mowers are available in 60- and 72-in. cutting widths. The decks are designed with two blades rotating clockwise and one blade rotating counterclockwise to spread clippings evenly through the rear discharge port.

The Toro Co. // Toro.com/professional



Tank series

Ideal for mowing properties up to 15 acres, the Tank SZ (pictured) and LZ feature an integrated 14cc Commercial Drive System that provides high operating efficiency power to the deck and durability. The mowers feature cooler run temperatures that increase transmission life, the company says. They are capable of ground speeds at 11 mph forward and 5 mph reverse.

Cub Cadet // CubCadet.com



Electronic fuel injection mowers

New Grasshopper EFI mowers feature Delphi-based, closed-loop engines that monitor internal and external factors and make automatic adjustments to maintain an optimum fuel ratio. Automotive-style plug-in diagnostics facilitate faster and more precise service. Models 327 EFI and 727T EFI accept side-discharge cutting decks up to 72 in. as well as dedicated rear discharge decks and PowerVac Collection Systems.

The Grasshopper Co. // GrasshopperMower.com



Pro-Turn 400

Gravely introduces Kawasaki big block engine options to the Pro-Turn 400 zero-turn mower lineup. The mowers also feature the industry's first air-suspension seat and a new effortless deck lift, the company says. A rubber isolated foot platform minimizes vibration for a more comfortable ride. Each gas and diesel mower has a 13.4-gal. fuel capacity.

Gravely // Gravely.com

IRRIGATION CONTROLLERS



WeatherTRAK Budget Manager

The new WeatherTRAK Budget Manager uses a real-time, online dashboard to track actual or estimated water use against budget, analyze trends and share budget-related reports with property and operations teams to quickly identify site issues between water bill cycles. It also can be used to assess the conservation potential for additional landscape investment projects, such as high-efficiency nozzles.

HydroPoint Data Systems // HydroPoint.com



Evolution

Toro's new Evolution controller features shortcut buttons with quick access to basic functions, while the advanced menu is shown on a graphics display that navigates similar to many modern consumer electronic devices. Use a standard USB drive to transfer programming to one or more controllers quickly and easily. The USB drive also provides controller logging functionality to save an operation log for diagnostic purposes.

The Toro Co. // ToroEvolution.com



CONNECT

The McCrometer CONNECT system can help monitor flow, soil moisture, weather, water quality, evapotranspiration and other critical inputs. Access data from a tablet, smartphone or personal computer and receive notifications via email, text or voice mail on irrigation system performance or when changes in environmental conditions occur. A range of sensors, communications systems and accessories for design flexibility are available. Local dealers provide service and support.

McCrometer // McCrometer.com

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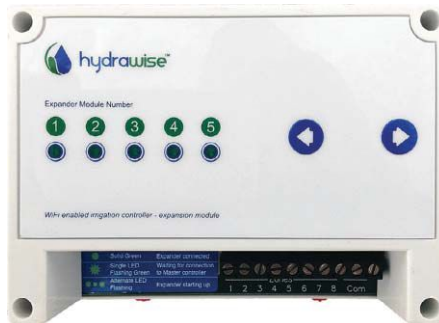
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ESP-SMTe

Rain Bird's ESP-SMTe is an enhanced version of its ESP-SMT weather-based irrigation control device. It consists of two key components: a controller chassis with an integrated smart panel and an on-site weather station that includes a temperature sensor with an integrated solar shield and a tipping rain bucket for instantaneous rainfall measurement. It's expandable to 22 zones.

Rain Bird // RainBird.com



8 Zone Expansion Module

Hydrawise's new 8 Zone Expansion Module takes a single controller's capacity to 16 zones. It plugs into the connector on the side of an existing controller and allows the expansion module to be placed in a different location to the main controller. All second-generation Hydrawise controllers (sold since March 2013) support the new module. A future upgrade is under development to allow up to 48 zones, the company says.

Hydrawise // Hydrawise.com

I-Core 3.0

The new version of the I-Core irrigation controller features a Solar Sync dial position and allows all sensor setup functions from the main control panel. The controller also permits a Solar Sync Delay feature, allowing the installer to specify a number of days before the controller switches to automatic adjustment mode.

Hunter Industries // HunterIndustries.com



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Pine Hall Brick Co. // PineHallBrick.com



Borealis

Techo-Bloc offers the Borealis wood plank concrete slab. The new modular 5-in.-wide slabs are available in Sauvignon Oak, Hazelnut Brandy and Smoked Pine.

Techo-Bloc // Techo-Bloc.com