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MARCH 2021

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Take it **OUTSIDE**

Learn which major design trends your clients will be asking for this season.

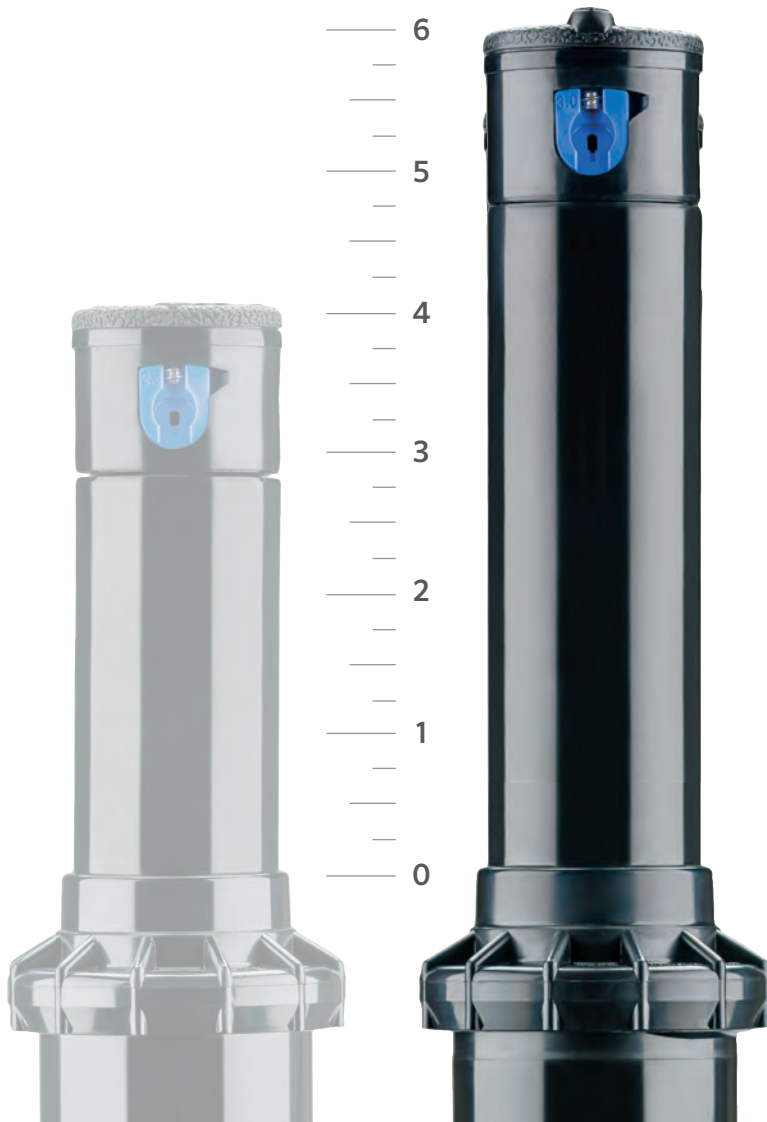
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Earn business with sustainable options, p. 30

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**Stay ahead of summer weeds.
Turn to page 38.**



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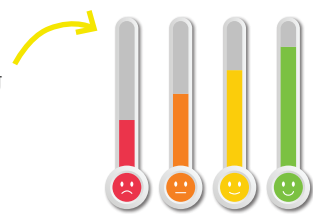


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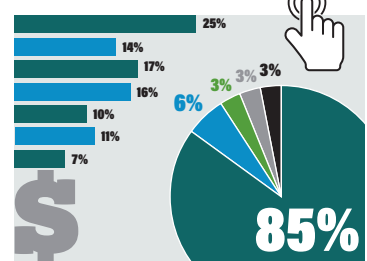
Show off your incredible projects with the Changing the Landscape Awards.

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See the results

Find out how industry professionals choose the right herbicides in our survey at www.igin.com/2021-chemical-product-survey.





Just because new jobs are coming in steadily doesn't mean that marketing and outreach efforts should slow down.

KYLE BROWN

Photo: Nikki Avramovich

Back after these messages

It's not as common right now for large groups of people to be able to do the same activity together. But about a month ago, about 91 million people across the country watched one very specific football game at the same time. Super Bowl LV might not have brought us a close matchup, but it definitely still pulled (responsibly socially distanced) viewers together for the night.

Among my friends, the discussion in the days after the game wasn't as much about what happened on the field as it was about what ran during the commercial breaks. Super Bowl commercials have been big business for as long as I can remember, with lots of buzz surrounding which one was the "best" of the bunch. They often try something different and attention-grabbing or they bring on big-name celebrities. No matter how much of the game you saw, you very likely have a favorite from this year's set.

I'm not writing about this to debate which one is the best. There's something noticeable about almost all of the companies that put down huge amounts of money both to buy the TV spot and produce something that's going to fight for viewers' attention between plays. Almost none of the companies involved are those that you'd say "need" the advertis-

ing. In most cases, they're current household names: Verizon, Anheuser-Busch, Cheetos or Disney. There's even a lot of renown to be had if your commercial doesn't make it to air.

There's something that industry professionals can take away from this, going into the new season. After the past year, landscape and irrigation contractors in some markets have been in high demand, bringing a backlog of work with them into March and April. It would be easy to think it's not important to advertise right now and that the work will keep up at this rate for the foreseeable future. That could be the case. But just because new jobs are coming in steadily doesn't mean that marketing and outreach efforts should slow down. Keep those moving steadily for when projects do eventually taper off, whether that's this season or not. You don't get to be a name like Disney by only advertising when demand for your product is low.

As you're looking at your advertising for the season, it never hurts for your company to have a few accolades to show off as well. Make certain that you've submitted one of your incredible projects from the past year or so to our new Changing the Landscape Awards. Find out more about those at www.igin.com/ctl_awards. 🌱

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IRRIGATION & green industry

The business magazine for landscape, irrigation and maintenance contractors

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INVESTORS CORNER

Doosan Bobcat North America invests in Einstein AI

Doosan Bobcat North America, West Fargo, North Dakota, completed a strategic equity investment with radar technologies startup company Einstein AI Inc., Lawrence, Kansas, to continue the development of next-generation radar sensor systems for Bobcat equipment solutions.

Doosan Bobcat's investment in Einstein AI comes at the completion of a Series A funding round. The investment agreement was finalized in December 2020.

"Radar sensor technology is a key component of our innovation accelerated strategy and ensures Bobcat provides the

most productive machinery on any work site," says Joel Honeyman, vice president of global innovation at Doosan Bobcat. "Radar will enhance equipment performance and provide our customers with optimal productivity and the ultimate operator experience through sensor technology. Our investment with Einstein allows us to work more closely to provide numerous solutions to our customers."

Doosan Bobcat first announced a strategic partnership with Einstein in June 2020 to identify forward-looking solutions to help equipment owners and operators

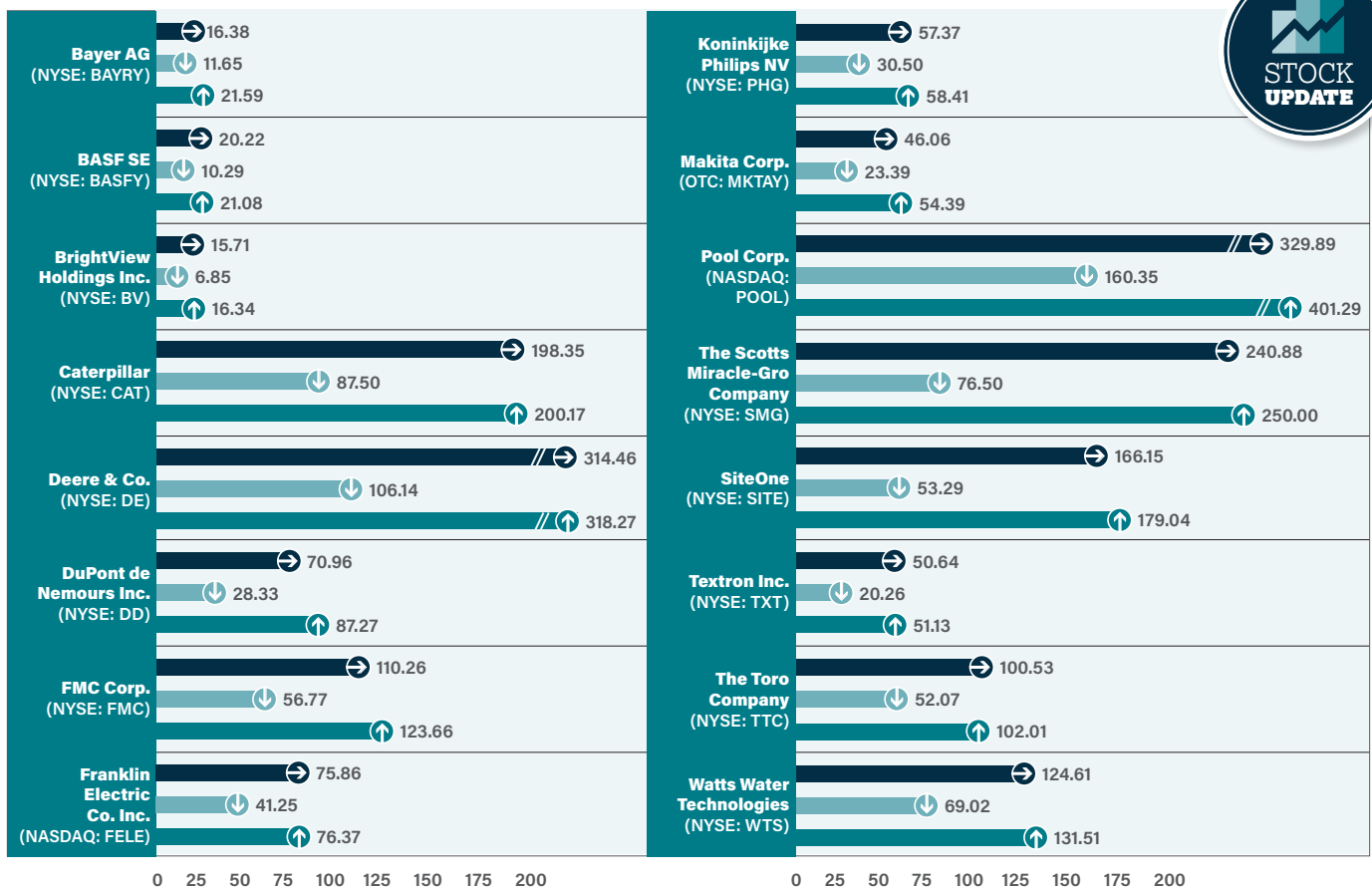


maximize productivity, efficiency and safety through innovation and technology. This latest strategic investment is designed to generate several shared-value benefits between the companies and customers.

Doosan Bobcat North America and Einstein will further collaborate to create next-generation radar sensor solutions to detect objects on job sites when using Bobcat equipment. This technology will enable obstacle avoidance solutions and future technologies that support autonomous operations. 🌱

"Radar sensor technology is a key component of our innovation accelerated strategy and ensures Bobcat provides the most productive machinery on any work site."

- Joel Honeyman, Doosan Bobcat vice president of global innovation



↔ Last trade (2-15-21) ↓ 52-week low ↑ 52-week high; Source: Bloomberg.com

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COVID-19

SingleOps study shows pandemic's economic impact on green industry

SingleOps, Atlanta, a provider of business management software for outdoor service providers, published its 2021 Green Industry Economic Report. The report includes data from thousands of green industry professionals in commercial and residential landscaping and tree care businesses in North America who used SingleOps in 2020. A key takeaway from the report is that landscape and tree care businesses persevered in 2020 despite challenges brought on by the pandemic, and various metrics indicate the industry as a whole performed well.

The 2021 Green Industry Economic Report is similar to previous economic reports published by SingleOps. It includes key industry metrics such as proposal acceptance rate, time to payment and revenue per hour. In creating the report, SingleOps analyzed more than 700,000 proposed jobs totaling \$1.4 billion and nearly 400,000 accepted jobs totaling nearly \$700 million.

Commercial and residential one-off landscaping service providers performed well in 2020. The average revenue per job for commercial projects was \$1,598 compared to \$1,198 for residential jobs. Commercial job bids were accepted by clients 75% of the time compared to 59% for residential bids. Time to payment for commercial projects was 17 days versus 8 for residential, and the revenue per hour was \$125 for commercial assignments compared to \$139 for residential.

Providers of commercial and residential recurring landscape services also enjoyed a strong 2020. Average revenue per commercial job was \$5,390 compared to \$842 for residential work. Commercial providers achieved a 92% acceptance rate on bids while residential bids were approved at a rate of 97%. Time to payment for commercial jobs was 21 days compared to 13 for residential, and the average revenue per hour for commercial projects was \$128 versus \$194 for residential.

Commercial tree care service providers brought in an average of \$4,620 per job last year compared to \$1,369 for residential projects. Commercial providers achieved a 62% acceptance rate on bids while residential bids were approved at a rate of 49%. Time to payment for commercial jobs was 24 days compared to seven for residential, and revenue per hour was \$112 for commercial jobs and \$120 for residential.



QUICK TAKES

Green Group forms two new partnerships

Raleigh, North Carolina-based Green Group, a turf maintenance startup led by industry veteran Keith Freeman, was formed along with two new strategic partnerships with turf management companies: Eastern Turf Maintenance and Loyalty Lawn Care.

In joining Green Group, all employees from both Eastern Turf Maintenance and Loyalty Lawn Care remain in place, bringing the total number of those employed by Green Group to more than 100. Green Group is currently hiring 20 additional employees to support new partnerships and growth.

NaturaLawn of America opens two new locations

NaturaLawn of America, Frederick, Maryland, opened two new franchise locations. The company has expanded service to customers in New Hampshire and Mississippi.

New franchise owners Diego Antonio of New Hampshire and Justin Sapp of Mississippi join the NaturaLawn of America franchise system for the 2021 season.

Senske Services acquires ExperiGreen Lawn Care

Senske Services, Kennewick, Washington, acquired ExperiGreen Lawn Care of Aurora, Colorado. With this strategic expansion into Colorado, Senske continues to position itself as a provider of lawn, tree and pest control services across the western United States.

Founded in 2016, ExperiGreen Lawn Care offers lawn and tree care services to Aurora and the surrounding Denver area. Current employees and managers have joined the Senske team. Services will continue for customers uninterrupted with expanded offerings.

Acquisition

BrightView acquires Green Image

BrightView Holdings Inc., Blue Bell, Pennsylvania, acquired Green Image LLC (GTI) based in Las Vegas.

"GTI and its more than 400 team members are a great strategic addition to our operations in the western U.S.," says Andrew Masterman, BrightView president and CEO.

Founded in 2004, GTI provides services including landscape development and maintenance, homeowner association streetscapes and entries, parks, common areas, play structures, athletic fields and water features.

"We look forward to the new opportunities our people will have joining the BrightView team," said GTI's Brock Krahenbuhl. "It's very exciting and we are ready for this new expansion in the landscape industry."



Photo: Fecon LLC

Acquisition

Fecon purchases the Vermeer forestry mulching products

Fecon LLC, Lebanon, Ohio, purchased the Vermeer forestry mulcher product line, and through this arrangement, has established a global distribution agreement with the company. This distribution agreement with Vermeer, which will be rolled out on a controlled basis throughout 2021, will provide their dealers access to the line of mulching equipment.

“Adding Fecon engineering and technology will make it easier for customers to buy the equipment best suited to their needs,” says Fecon CEO Bob Dieckman. “With their extensive coverage and high standard of customer support, as well as the professional and strategic Vermeer sales organization, we are certain that both organizations will benefit from the partnership.”

Fecon will start the process with a global group of Vermeer dealers in 2021, as well as strategically specify products and methodically expand from there. The company will assume production and support of the Vermeer model FT100 and FT300 forestry mulching tractors.

Business

Ecogel sponsors GreenCare for Troops and SnowCare for Troops programs

Arborjet | Ecogel, Woburn, Massachusetts, will be an official Silver sponsor of Project EverGreen’s GreenCare for Troops program for the third consecutive year.

“We are proud to continue to support Project EverGreen as their mission directly aligns with our philosophy of preserving green spaces, including lawns, trees, parks and communities in a sustainable way,” says Rick Irwin, president of Ecogel. “We look forward to supporting our troops and frontline workers through the 2021 season.”

GreenCare for Troops is a need-based program for active-duty deployed service members. Last year, the program engaged close to 1,500 active volunteers who helped more than 700 military families maintain their home lawns.

Ecogel has committed to provide its soil moisture management Hydretain products for free to help maintain the lawns and landscapes of deployed military personnel, while also helping them reduce their water bills.



Irrigation

EPA WaterSense releases final specs for sensor-based controllers

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency WaterSense program has released its Specification for Soil Moisture-Based Irrigation Controllers. With this publication, consumers will now have more choices than ever for WaterSense-labeled irrigation technologies available on the market.

Soil moisture-based irrigation controllers now join weather-based controllers, spray sprinkler bodies and professional certifications in the WaterSense portfolio of labeled irrigation technologies and programs. Like weather-based irrigation controllers, WaterSense-labeled soil moisture sensors can be stand-alone controllers or “add-on” or “plug-in” devices that can be used in tandem with an existing controller to help it water more efficiently.

With the release of the specification, these products can earn the WaterSense label. Manufacturers, retailers and distributors that produce or sell soil moisture sensors are welcome to join the program as WaterSense partners and begin applying to label or promote labeled sensors.

Software

Software provider ServicePro joins ServiceTitan family

ServiceTitan, Los Angeles, a software solution for residential and commercial service contractors, partnered with ServicePro, Columbus, Ohio, a software solution for the pest, lawn and arbor industries, to deliver expertise and support to customers via scaled resources and innovation.

ServicePro will continue to help its customers meet their goals as part of the ServiceTitan family of companies. ServiceTitan’s investment ensures improved return on investment for ServicePro users with a heightened focus on live support, dedicated account management and improved product experience.

“Existing ServicePro customers can expect to see benefits immediately as we take our solutions and support to a new level,” says ServicePro CEO Andy Deering.

Deering and Kim O’Connor, chief information officer, will still lead ServicePro as a subsidiary to ServiceTitan and ensure continuity of service and roll out future ServSuite releases for customers.





BY STACIE ZINN ROBERTS

Build your portfolio with photos

You spend your days creating innovative landscapes. Clients are happy. You're happy. You turn over the project and go on to the next.

But wait. Before you leave the job site for the last time, are you forgetting something? If you've completed a successful project and not taken photos of it, you've lost an opportunity. When you take photos of your work, you create a resource to help you sell the next job. However, capturing that photo isn't enough. You've got to put it to work for your business. Here's how.



Instagram and Facebook are visual platforms. **You need good pictures.**

Website portfolios

Does your website feature a gallery of photos showcasing your best work? It should. Create an online portfolio of photos that highlight exemplary projects. Choose examples that make you feel proud. And don't just throw a photo up there; tell a story about it. Write a description that explains what we're seeing. Explain what the goal of the project was and how you accomplished it. If the client wanted a certain feel or theme, describe what you did to bring that to life. If there were special challenges you had to overcome, obstacles that you developed a creative solution to fix or circumvent, spell it out. Use your website as if it were a 24/7, full-color brochure on the internet. Be sure that the photos are high-quality, with professional lighting, if possible. Hiring a good photographer is worth the investment. It's your website. Anyone visiting it wants to see examples of your work. That's why they're there! Remember to update your portfolio regularly. Don't let it look outdated.

Social media

Instagram and Facebook are visual platforms. You need good pictures. The photos you put on your website portfolio can also be used on social media. What you can do on social media that you might not want to put in your portfolio are in-process shots. If you're working on a cool project, and the client doesn't object, you can show the progress of a landscape job from

groundbreaking to installation to completion. Post photos right from your cell phone onto your business (not your personal) Facebook or Instagram accounts. People visiting these platforms expect cell phone photos, so professional-quality shots are not required. Posting job photos in this manner shows off your process and gives potential clients an insight into how you work and what they might expect if they hire you.

If you're not on Houzz.com, put it on your calendar to create an account soon. Houzz allows you to post a comprehensive portfolio of your landscape design work. This social media site is dedicated to home project ideas and local sources for materials and services like yours. Write an extensive company overview here that tells potential clients exactly what you do, along with any other qualifications. Then create project portfolios that show your very best work. You can list your contact information, link to your website and even get messages and calls through the site. Potential clients can search for landscape contractors by location, so it's an online resource for customers to find you. But first, you've got to be on there.

Brochures and print ads

Any printed content you create also needs good photos. Using photos of your actual projects, as opposed to buying stock photos, lends credibility. However, cell phone photos generally will not work for print pieces. Only professional photos should be used in printed brochures and ads. They need to look great and be high resolution for them to print properly.

No matter where you use photos of your projects, be sure that the photos are not only flattering of the project but also that the work site is clean, your staff is wearing any required safety equipment and that there isn't anyone in the background doing anything odd or unseemly. If the client doesn't want their project photographed, honor that. If you have permission, go ahead and put those photos to use to help you grow your reputation and your business.

Like what you read here? Please follow me on Twitter @whatsyouravocado and thanks! 🌿



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BY KEVIN SMITH

Understanding transformers



Back in the late 1950s when Bill Locklin invented the first 12-volt lighting system, he provided power to it with a low voltage AC transformer. Out of necessity, he built it himself. The transformers we use today are remarkably similar, and it's useful to understand how they work.

Transformer basics

A transformer does not transform anything. The way we use it is more like a power reducer. It functions like a pressure regulator on a drip system, which lowers the pressure but does not cut off the flow.

Transformers work on the principal of electromagnetic induction. There are two sides to a transformer: a primary side and a secondary side. The primary side accepts a higher current such as 120-volt. The secondary side is the low voltage side. This can produce 12-volt AC power or be a multi tap from 12- to 15-volt AC power. When the transformer is plugged into a 120-volt receptacle, a voltage is induced from the primary side to the secondary side. This means that the 120-volt side never comes in direct contact with the 12-volt side. A circuit breaker on the low voltage side protects the low voltage side. If a set of cables in the field should cross and create a direct short circuit, the breaker will trip. This will also happen should the transformer be overloaded.

Mounting a transformer

When mounting a transformer, it is important to follow all of the manufacturer's specifications.

Above-ground transformers must be installed a minimum of 12 inches above grade. This is measured from finished grade to the bottom of the transformer. Most transformers will be mounted outdoors on a wall. Always use the proper mounting hardware. Plug the transformer into a ground fault circuit interrupter protected outlet with a plastic bubble cover. Be sure to mount the transformer within 3 feet of the GFCI receptacle. Create a drip loop on the power cord. This will help keep the transformer dry.

Transformers can be mounted to a pressure-treated lumber post. Some manufacturers provide

a prefabricated unit with a GFCI and bubble cover. Both should be set in a concrete footing. Often, a transformer is installed by the swimming pool equipment. There is normally a GFCI receptacle mounted to the side of the pool panel. Do not plug the transformer into this receptacle. This is the GFCI for the pool light. Have a licensed electrician add another circuit breaker and GFCI receptacle for landscape lighting.

Be sure you are using the correct conduit size for field wires you are installing into the transformer. This conduit should also include male adapters for the knockout size on the bottom of the transformer. To allow the cable to move through the sleeve more easily, 90-degree electrical sweeps should be installed on the bottom of the conduit. Using the conduit will protect your field wires and provide a tidy installation.

Finishing the installation

Before you install cable to the transformer terminals, make sure the transformer is unplugged from the 120-volt receptacle. It is especially important to have a solid mechanical connection on the terminals. Loose terminal connections can cause fires. Strip the insulation off your cable carefully and avoid cutting any strands. Open the terminal throat with the proper screwdriver. Place one side of the cable into the proper voltage tap and tighten it. Rotate the cable in a clockwise motion and tighten the terminal as much as possible. Repeat this process with the other side of the cable into the common terminal block. The block will normally be gray or white in color and marked "COM."

When this is completed, plug in the transformer to the receptacle. Turn on the circuit breaker to test the system. The circuit breaker will need to be in an on position to provide power to the field. Follow all the manufacturer's instructions for installing timer photo-cells or Wi-Fi smart plugs specifically for low voltage landscape lighting.

Transformers are the heart of any low voltage lighting systems. Be sure to select one with Underwriters Laboratories and or ETL certifications. 🌿



A transformer **does not transform anything.** The way we use it is more like a **power reducer.**



Kevin Smith is the national technical support and trainer at Brilliance LED LLC, Carefree, Arizona, and can be reached at kevin.smith@brillianceled.com.



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Take it **OUTSIDE**

Learn which major design trends your clients will be asking for this season.

By Kyle Brown



Photo: Wagner Nursery, Inc.

Last year was anything but a typical season for most landscape designers and contractors. For some, they weren't certain they would have a season at all. But as homeowners spent more time inside in the early part of the past year, many decided to revamp backyards and outdoor living spaces.

In some cases, clients have been looking for the same extended living areas as they have for the past few years. But some new trends such as fruit-bearing plants and landscape lighting have started to emerge as homeowners really began to engage with the backyard as a way to get out of the house.

Here are a few of the big trends that could carry over into the new season.

EXTEND YOUR SPACE

Many clients have been requesting outdoor spaces that look and feel more like the indoors, says Kevin Willcox, owner of WIL Design/Consulting, San Antonio. For some recent projects, he's worked with outdoor bar areas covered by sail shades or sitting areas with a television. In the past year, his designs leaned much more

toward hardscaping and outdoor living spaces than directly dealing with planted landscaping.

"People are requesting things like outdoor kitchens and even outdoor showers to have around their pools," says Willcox. "One shower I put in was as big as the one in my bathroom."

Pergolas are also growing in popularity as a way to add some architecture to an outdoor living space while also building in more greenery, he says. The designs incorporate walls that cordon off different parts of the backyard and build in elements such as fireplaces.

As homeowners spent more time at home because of the quarantine, they wanted to make use of the outdoor space where it felt safer to relax and see friends even at a distance, says Ivan Katz, visionary at Great Lakes Landscape Design, Oak Park, Michigan. Clients are looking for design elements to be a larger format than before.

Beyond just a general push for larger outdoor living spaces, Katz has seen more clients coming in with a detailed idea of what the space should look like. Part of that is because clients have had more time to think through design decisions, which translates into better communication with them overall.

“People are definitely coming to the table prepared,” he says. “Because we have that, we’re able to suggest a lot more, and people understand the ideas even if they don’t do it all at once.”

Regardless of how far that timeline stretches, it’s critical to begin with a full master plan, he says. Ask how the clients use their house and how they anticipate using the outdoor space. What considerations need to be made for children, and what parts of the plan are a priority? It’s also crucial for clients to understand the overall budget before making any forward progress.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

The biggest thing that clients are requesting is that outdoor spaces be low-maintenance, says Morgan Leverington, garden center manager, Wagner Nursery Inc., Asbury, Iowa. While that’s often top of the list for many clients, it was an especially common request in the past 12 months.

“The less they’ll have to do once it’s all together, the happier they’ll be,” she says.

That means landscapes with plants that require little to no trimming or continuous care to provide a backdrop for the living space. One style of plant that Leverington has been using more of to satisfy those customers is dwarf varieties.

“We’ve been using dwarf varieties of some of the bigger plants that everyone typically likes,” she says. “That way they don’t have to be out there trimming constantly, but they still have a permanent landscape fixture that looks nice and clean.”

In terms of design, using dwarf varieties opens up opportunities to have healthy, growing plants right next to the house for clients to enjoy. Often, it means including more beds in the design because they don’t fill up as much visual space. Using a larger anchor plant in the design can provide a good balance.

Smart water use ties into the idea of reducing overall maintenance requirements in outdoor living



Left: Pergolas are becoming more popular in outdoor living areas as a way of incorporating both architecture and greenery. Above: As homeowners spent time quarantined, they’ve had time to look for their own design inspirations, such as water features. Photos: Great Lakes Landscape Design

spaces, says Willcox. Especially in south Texas, the materials and plants need to be specifically chosen to survive the harsh drought environment. While many of his clients are getting away from using decorative grasses, he incorporates desert plants that will handle the weather effectively.

PICK THE RIGHT PLANTS

Native plants have also been more popular with clients for the past year, says Leverington. They're a major focus because they tend to handle the regional weather better but also because they tend to be more hardy when dealing with the local soil types and plant diseases.

"It's especially good for our clients, because they're not constantly having to replace plants," she says.

When using native plants, clients are often worried that the finished design won't be as visually interesting as one using more exotic choices.

But native plants can provide just as much of a visual impact, says Willcox.

"There's always going to be something interesting," he says. Species like salvias and lantanas in his region can provide golds, purples and reds blooming at different times of the year. "You can get some really good color. It's really more about being able to know which plants are going to give you that."

Leverington relies on information from the local Department of Natural Resources as a starting point for finding native varieties. Her suppliers will also often have suggestions for native choices for the region.

Another current popular feature in outdoor living spaces partially driven by the quarantine is incorporating fruit gardens in the design, says Leverington.

"So many more people wanted to have fruit trees," she says. "This is the first year that I think we really sold out of all of our fruit trees in the season."

Leverington saw multiple designs using apple, pear, peach, plum or cherry trees, but berry-

“**PEOPLE ARE DEFINITELY COMING TO THE TABLE PREPARED. BECAUSE WE HAVE THAT, WE'RE ABLE TO SUGGEST A LOT MORE.**

*- Ivan Ratz,
Great Lakes
Landscape Design*



Dwarf varieties and small plants have made a big impact for landscape designs in the past year, as clients have requested outdoor spaces that are visually interesting and low-maintenance. Photos: Wagner Nursery Inc.



A TOUGH ORDER

One of the biggest struggles of the past season for Morgan Leverington, garden center manager, Wagner Nursery Inc., Asbury, Iowa, has been sourcing larger plants and trees consistently. Often, clients looking for new services requested bigger trees and shrubs immediately, but the market couldn't support it.

"In years past, we were able to fulfill those requests," she says. "But a lot of these growers, they cannot keep up with the demand. In the next few years, we're going to see very small plants being delivered to the nursery, because it takes so long for a tree or shrub to get to a good, substantial size."

That could continue into future seasons if demand doesn't slow down this year, she says.

While Kevin Willcox, owner of WIL Design/Consulting, San Antonio, doesn't do most of the direct installs on his designs, he works with contractors throughout the process. He's heard more than once that sourcing particular plants has gotten much more difficult in the past year. In some cases, contractors have had to expand their networks of grower contacts to find either the right plant or one that will work for the install.

"If it gets to the point where it's too hard to find it, I just don't use it anymore," he says.

In most cases, though clients were frustrated, Leverington has just been up front about the difficulty facing the market currently.

"Things take time," she says. "It's not like we can just produce a plant from a factory. It takes a good six or seven years in the ground before it's even able to be dug up and used in the landscape."

That demand stress isn't limited to just plants, either. Lead times for hardscaping products have gone further out than typical, says Ivan Katz, visionary at Great Lakes Landscape Design, Oak Park, Michigan. That calls for careful planning of which products to use within a design and ordering the product as early as possible once the design is nailed down. To keep the conversation moving, he often suggests products to the client in order to get to the decisions made quickly.

producing bushes were also a big hit and are supportive of local pollinators. While those add an interactive element to the landscape, those types of plants can cause some headaches in design, especially in areas with heavy wildlife traffic.

When designing around a fruit- or berry-producing plant, it can be useful to try to place it near the house to discourage animals from foraging. Tree guards can be used in some situations, and repellants can be effective, she says. Some smaller plants can also be deterrents to animals like deer.

LIGHT IT UP

One outdoor living feature that Willcox has seen a big increase in over the past year is landscape lighting, as clients want to be able to use that outdoor area late into the evening.

"People will spend a lot of money on it," he says. "They want to be able to enjoy the landscaping as much at night as during the day. You get a totally different look at night."

Accent lighting has been an integral part of many of Willcox's recent designs, which makes the outdoor space more accessible and improves security. He uses it to highlight a key plant or landscaping element like a sculpture.

Willcox uses an overlay when he's working on landscape lighting designs to give his clients a sense of what the finished result will look like. He'll also

occasionally take a light kit out to the client's property for a demonstration, but that's much more rare.

Beyond landscape lighting, Katz is seeing more landscape designs that incorporate a heater or fire element to not only extend the time that an outdoor living space can be used at night, but the number of nights total throughout the year.

"There's so many options, and it doesn't have to cost a lot of money," he says.

BLOCK IT OUT

Outdoor living space designs in the past year have included much more hardscaping than typical, says Leverington.

"We've done more retaining wall work and patio work than I think we've ever had to do," she says.

It's not just that hardscapes are becoming more popular. More decorative stone choices have been on the rise as compared to more standard plain pebble finish concrete, says Willcox.

That lines up with what Leverington has seen, as clients have shifted away from more natural, free-form designs.


"We used to have a lot more abstract, natural looks to them," she says. "But now people want more of that nice, clean, linear look. As we go into 2021, we're trying to order things that will maybe have more of those cleaner looks, with blues, blacks and whites."

One choice Willcox has seen used more often is cinderblock with stucco, incorporating stone on the edges. When he's working with a client to determine the right hardscaping material, he starts by trying to get a bead on the client's taste.

"I spend a lot of time with them, figuring out exactly what they want so we don't have to go through the design process 100 times," Willcox says.

LANDSCAPE DESIGNS INCORPORATING *dwarf varieties* CAN LEND THEMSELVES TO CLIENTS LOOKING FOR *low-maintenance* OUTDOOR LIVING SPACES.

A useful starting place is to look at the materials the house itself is made from, he says. Often, clients will want the hardscaped area to look as if it's flowing seamlessly from the established structure, as an extension of the original building.

"In years past, if you did a swimming pool in the backyard, you maybe had a sidewalk to it," Willcox says. "Now it's not just a pool stuck out in the middle of the backyard. It's all incorporated in what you've got going around it, with a fire pit and things of that nature." 

The author is editor-in-chief of *Irrigation & Green Industry* and can be reached at kylebrown@igin.com.



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Lex Mason, incoming president of Weathermatic, learned about the irrigation industry by watching his father, Mike Mason, help turn the company around in the 1990s. Photo: Mausey Photography



Lex Mason

GROWING INTO THE ROLE

THE NEW PRESIDENT OF WEATHERMATIC USES THE LESSONS HE PICKED UP AT A YOUNG AGE TO FUEL HIS VISION FOR THE COMPANY.

BY LAUREN SABLE FREIMAN

At the beginning of this year, Lex Mason was officially promoted to president of Dallas-based Weathermatic. His degree in management and entrepreneurship from Baylor's Hankamer School of Business has certainly been helpful over the years as he's navigated various leadership roles within the company. But the ultimate preparation and education for his new role began much earlier in his life, in the form of the dinner table MBA he earned at an early age in the Mason household.

"My entry point into the business started at birth," Mason says. "People laugh when I say that, but every dinner table discussion with my father Mike Mason, who is the current CEO, my two younger brothers Ben and Elliot, and my mom Happy, was about business."

Mason says his first clear memory of the business is from his seventh birthday in November 1999, which he spent at the Irrigation Association's Irrigation Show. He vividly recalls handing out foam footballs displaying the company's logo as show attendees passed the booth.

"I also remember zipping up and down the aisles on a blue Weathermatic Razor scooter," Mason says. "From a young age, my father pulled me into it and exposed me to the great business we're in."

Founded by Max Snoddy in 1945, the company recruited Mike Mason to turn the

company around in the early 1990s, and the Mason family soon became majority shareholders. In the early days, it was no secret that times were tough.

"I was exposed to more at a young age than many people might believe is right, but there was no filter," Mason says. "When we as a family had dark and tight times in the beginning, we talked about them and knew what the implications were, and we came together as a family unit to get through them. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, we were living different lives, but it prepared us for the success we're having now."

Mason vividly remembers a particularly difficult period, about 15 years ago, when the company suffered from a premature product failure on its light-duty solenoid. Learning that a former employee had falsified quality audits in order to hit a target was devastating, but seeing the negative impact it had on loyal customers was especially heartbreaking.

"I sat at the breakfast table for six months and witnessed my father remortgage our home, remortgage our office and max out every penny of the credit line to ensure we helped our customers in need," he says. "We physically wrote checks until there wasn't any money left. That kind of experience is not something you forget. It's hard to admit failure, but we used that experience to learn and get better."

Although there were times during his teen years when he considered pursuing a

career in a different industry, his mindset slowly shifted as he learned more about the company his father rescued from distress. He says watching the irrigation industry's increasing reliance on technology was exciting. That, combined with the fact that the national cost of water was rapidly rising, screamed potential.

"My dad knew that if he kept revealing more and more of the opportunity, eventually I would wise up and jump into it," he says. "As I started working summers at the office, I fell more and more in love with what he built. From freshman year in high school and beyond, I was dead set on what I wanted to do, and I was chomping at the bit to get into working in the family business."

A FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

After learning the business from his father and longtime members of the company's executive leadership team for so many years, Mason says he feels like he's been part of the business for decades. But Mason is just 28 years old, making him unique among industry executives.

"Our industry is aging, not just in the manufacture realm but in the supplier and distribution realm," Mason says. "We've seen it happening in the irrigation trade as a whole, and that's something that's on the forefront of my mind, preparing for the next chapter and the next wave of individuals who will propel our industry to the next level."

CLOSE-UP PROFILE

Mason says Weathermatic actively recruits college graduates and introduces them to the opportunities available in the irrigation industry. Despite the past year's challenges, Mason says they've recruited talent from industries hard hit by fallout from the pandemic. At peak production, it employs 100 people — among them, a recent hire from the commercial real estate space who had the passion and drive so desirable to a forward-thinking company.

“We always want to recruit the talent today so we can develop the talent we need five or 10 years from now,” he says. “If you're not recruiting the next generation, the talent pool runs out.”

A FOCUS ON SERVICE

In addition to ensuring a steady stream of next-generation talent, Mason says one of his priorities as president is continuing to shine a spotlight on customer service, an



The company gives back by drilling clean water wells in communities around the world. Mason believes a charitable focus helps Weathermatic bring in quality employees. Photo: Weathermatic

area where he says historically, Weathermatic has not received top marks. In the past 18 months, it has hired a vice president of customer experience to focus on building that support.

“With every product, whether it is a hardware product or a software product, it is only as good as the service and support that comes with it,” Mason says.

As the company grows its Weathermatic Partner Program, a program focused on supporting landscape maintenance companies as they expand into the business of water management, it has staffed a team to support these partners with a dedicated support person.

“In the next five years, you will see property managers place a higher priority on seeking a water management company than on the landscape services,” Mason says. “The price of landscape services hasn't changed a whole lot, but in the same 15-year period, the average cost of landscape water across the country has increased 50%. When our partners invest in this big change in the world, they are searching for someone to help them build a solution, and we are focused on doing everything we can to support them, versus focusing on how we can pull cost out of the support structure.”

It requires a different level of education and support to run a water management business as compared to a system repair business, he says.

“There is a difference between a subscription service, like Netflix, and software as a service,” Mason says. “We are heavy on the service side. We believe that if you are paying for something it should be fully supported.”

A FOCUS ON GIVING BACK

Mason says the company has also seized the opportunity to make an impact on the global water crisis. Its “Save Water Give Life” mission, founded in SmartLine inventor Matt Piper's memory, is dedicated to drilling clean water wells abroad. Mason says that for every SmartLink controller

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sold, Weathermatic donates the equivalent of a lifetime of clean drinking water for one person.

"We believe that everyone in the world should have access to clean drinking water, and we are so passionate about inspiring our family and partners in the distribution, irrigation and landscaping businesses to rally behind that same cause," he says.

Mason says Weathermatic aims to be a company that is driven by purpose as well as profit, and he says that mission resonates with employees. He believes it also positions the company to inspire, attract and retain top talent. As a leader of the company, Mason aims to understand each team member's motivation, whether it's family, job security or the impact they can make in the world.

"People want to go somewhere they can make a difference, and we've seen that more every year," Mason says. "I believe we have the best team in the business, largely because of this."

To date, it has drilled 67 wells out of its goal of 500. While a handful are in Africa, the majority are in Central America, which has sometimes brought the reality of the situation close to home for him.

"My dad knew that if he kept revealing more and more of the opportunity, eventually **I would wise up and jump into it.**"

— Lex Mason, Weathermatic

"We recently brought the whole team together and announced the latest well, just outside of Rivas, Nicaragua, a town of about 300 people off the beaten path," Mason says. One of the production team members burst into tears and told the group that the town is where her brother lives. "There wasn't a dry eye in the house. Seeing how we are so small in the scheme of the world, the fact that, within our four walls, we directly made an impact in our Weathermatic family, that ignites the passion that we have to make an impact on the global water crisis."

As Mason settles into his new role, a demanding position that he's wanted for a long time, he says he is thankful for the role his family, including his wife Cassie and

daughters Mackenzie and Georgia, have played in his success, and he is energized by the innovation and growth that lie ahead. As he and Cassie await the birth of their third child, dinner table conversations at the Mason house haven't zeroed in on the ins and outs of his company just yet.

"Selfishly, I've always dreamed of having them come into the business and elevate past what their old man could manage," Mason says. "At 3 and 18 months,

the dinner table income statement reviews haven't quite started yet, but each time they come to bring me lunch at work, Cassie and I walk them through the plant, introduce them to all our great team members and teach them all that goes into running Weathermatic." 🌱

Lauren Sable Freiman is a freelance writer based in Cleveland and can be reached at laurensable@gmail.com.

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Get more value from your customers by keeping connected.

BY DAVE FELLMAN

It's pretty well established that customers care about value. If you provide it, they buy from you. It's as simple as that. But I wonder, are you getting all the value you could be from your customer relationships? Are your customers doing as much for you as you are for them? Your business will be more successful if "value" is a two-way street. I believe that each one of your customers provides you with three distinct levels of value.

First is the value of what they're buying from you now. Second is the value of what they could be buying from you. Third is the value of influence; the ways in which current customers can help you develop new customers.

So, are you getting anything close to maximum value from your customers?

REACHING OUT

The first level of value is all about what they're buying from you now. What's important about this level is that you protect it. In other words, that you don't lose customers. Here's an obvious statement: Happy customers don't get lost!

Now an obvious question: Do you have happy customers?

Here is a series of exercises to answer that question. First, sit down with a list of your customers. If you have lots of them, you might start with the 25 you consider to be most important. Next, give each of them a "temperature" rating, using 98.6 degrees as

the temperature of a healthy relationship, as it's the temperature of a healthy human body. A rating of 90 degrees might indicate a relationship that's mildly stressed; not really threatened, but not quite as strong as you'd like it to be. A temperature of 80 degrees would indicate more serious stress, and so on. After your own rating, I'd encourage you to ask others in your organization, perhaps your crew chief or accounting supervisor, for their perspective.

Next, make the first of a series of "interval" calls on those customers. This call has two purposes. First, confirm your temperature rating. Second, establish the appropriate interval for future calls. It needs to be long enough that you won't be smothering them, but short enough to avoid a problem that you don't find out about until it's too late to save the relationship.

Back to confirming the temperature. I hereby give you permission to blame me for this call. Here's what you might say to your customer: "I recently read an article by a consultant who works in our industry. He was writing about tracking the temperature of customer relationships." Provide the scale, and say, "I have an idea where we are, but I don't want to presume anything. I wanted to ask you today, what do you think the temperature of our relationship is?" That question hopefully leads to a frank discussion, and from there, you can talk about the frequency of future "How are we doing?" calls.



to talk about and the real possibility of increasing your sales to that customer.

By the way, this could be something very good to talk about on one of those “interval” calls I suggested earlier.

SPREADING THE WORD

The third level of value is all about influence, the ways in which current customers can help you develop new customers. Here we’re taking about two things: referrals and testimonials.

In order to fully appreciate this opportunity, let’s understand that there are referrals and then there’s something called word-of-mouth. That term is often used to describe the phenomenon by which one of your customers says something nice about you to a friend or colleague or family member and that person in turn initiates contact. Word-of-mouth is really more of a testimonial than a referral, but more importantly, it’s mostly a passive strategy. By that I mean you’re probably appreciative when word-of-mouth brings you a new customer, but you don’t do enough to encourage it.

Encouraging it is simple. Just add an element to your temperature tracking. When you confirm that the temperature is high, go the extra step and ask your customer to tell someone else about the experience of doing business with you. It’s been proven that it might happen if you say nothing. Doesn’t it make sense that it might happen more often if you encourage it?

Alternately, you might ask a happy customer for a testimonial that you could put on your website or your Facebook page. If we’ve learned anything from the modern marketplace, it’s that testimonials and customer reviews have real value.

MAXIMUM VALUE

Let me end this with one more question. What percentage of maximum value do you think you’re getting from your customer base right now? If your answer is 90% or higher, you still have some opportunity here, but I’d say you’re doing a really good job of getting value from your customers. If your answer is 70% or below, you have a lot of opportunity, and depending on how well you’re protecting the first level of value, you may have a lot at risk.

From what I’ve seen, the majority of businesses are in the second category. Hopefully what you’ve just read will get you started on doing something about that. 🌱

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Dave Fellman is the president of David Fellman & Associates, based in Raleigh, North Carolina. He’s the author of “Rules of Engagement: A Guide to Better Communication and Better Relationships With Everyone Who Is Important To Your Business.” Visit his website at www.davefellman.com, and contact him by email at dmf@davefellman.com.

ADDING ON

The second level of value is all about what they could be buying from you beyond what they’re already buying from you. That raises the question of how you describe what you sell. I suspect that the words complete and comprehensive are part of your description. But this question may be not so obvious: What does complete lawn care or comprehensive irrigation services actually mean? I know that, as an industry professional, you know. The real question is whether your customer understands it as well. Which of these statements has the better chance of connecting and educating? “We’re a comprehensive lawn care company,” or, “We do A, B, C and D.”

What’s important about the second level of value is to maximize it, and education is the key to that process. No one will ever buy a thing from you if they don’t know that you sell it. But let’s also consider this: The worst way to sell is to make a canned presentation. The best way to sell is to ask questions, establish interest and then take the next step if there is any. No customer will ever buy anything from you if they don’t want or need it.

Here’s the conversation I envision between you and your customer: “You’ve bought quite a bit of A from us over the years and a little bit of B. But we also do C. So I wanted to ask you today, do you have any want or need for C?” If they do, you have something



GIVE YOUR CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS
A **TEMPERATURE RATING** TO SEE HOW
HEALTHY THEY ARE, AND FOLLOW UP IN
REGULAR INTERVALS.

Back to the basics

By Bob Jansen and Eric Holtan



Use these
6 tips for
proper pump
operation.

With spring around the corner, many irrigation professionals are beginning to check their systems for repair and planning how they will operate over the next season. We offer some helpful tips covering a variety of pumping topics for making this a great year for your irrigation endeavors. Remember, these are quick reminders. Each of these subjects could be further detailed on their own in multiple books.

1 Understand NPSH

There are two measurements of net positive suction head that we need to know for proper operation of your system: NPSH available (NPSHa) and NPSH required (NPSHr).

NPSHa is determined by a property of your irrigation system. It is a calculated value, and in simplest terms, it is the suction-side pressure minus the vapor pressure of the liquid pumped to the measurement point, most often the eye of the impeller.

NPSHr is the required minimum pressure at the suction inlet that keeps the pump from cavitating. It is a tested value/function of the pump that the pump manufacturer determines.

There are some general guidelines to keep in mind when working with NPSH in your irrigation system. NPSHa must be greater than NPSHr or the pump will

cavitate. Cavitating pumps reduces life and efficiency and can harm the rest of your system. Also, you should allow a safety factor of 2 feet of head so that NPSHa does not cross below the NPSHr value. It's better to be safe than sorry.

Atmospheric pressure, suction lift and liquid temperature affect NPSHa. Be sure you know the range of values when you make your calculations, and prepare for the worst operating conditions. On the suction side of the pump, increases in friction loss such as corrosion of a pipe or partially closing a valve also affect NPSHa. Check what you're doing as you work so the pump does not cavitate.

A simple formula to determine NPSHa in an installation where there is suction lift is: $NPSHa = \text{atmospheric pressure} - \text{suction lift} - \text{suction pipe friction loss} - \text{vapor pressure} - \text{entrance loss} - \text{other losses}$. For entrance loss, we use 3 feet, typically. Other losses include foot valves, elbows and fittings.

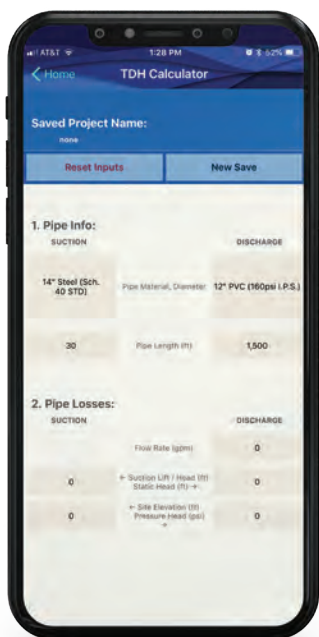
To make it easy on yourself you may want to invest in a vacuum gauge that will show you at a glance the total of all the head losses on the suction side. If the vacuum (converted to feet of water) is much lower than it should be, you could have air leaks that you have not identified. If the vacuum reads much higher than it should, then there is probably some problem in the suction pipe system that is causing excessive head loss and thus lowering your NPSHa.

2 There's an app for that

If this talk about NPSH has made your eyes gloss over, fear not. You have an NPSH estimator in your pocket if you carry a smartphone. Various free applications in the Apple App Store and Google Play Store walk you through step-by-step to estimate the NPSHa for your system.

The apps consider whether the system is open to atmosphere or if it is connected to a pressurized tank in a closed system. They also ask you if you have a flooded suction (liquid flowing to the pump above the eye of the impeller) or if you are pulling water up into the pump (suction lift). You input flow and select the length of pipe in the system, the size

Getting the correct figures for net positive suction head can be as easy as consulting one of the smartphone apps that help with the math. Photo: Cornell Pump Company



of the pipe and the pipe material of construction, plus call out valves, fittings, elbows and other friction loss points. The app will then return an estimation of your operating conditions. You can also check on total dynamic head in the system and see what different sizes pipes or fittings would do to your friction loss.

The apps make a handy check for conditions. There are dozens of apps offered, so you can try several to see which one you like best. We are partial to the free Cornell Mobile Toolkit.

3 Check suction first

When troubleshooting a pump station, more than 90% of the issues we see are on the suction side. We strongly suggest you start there.

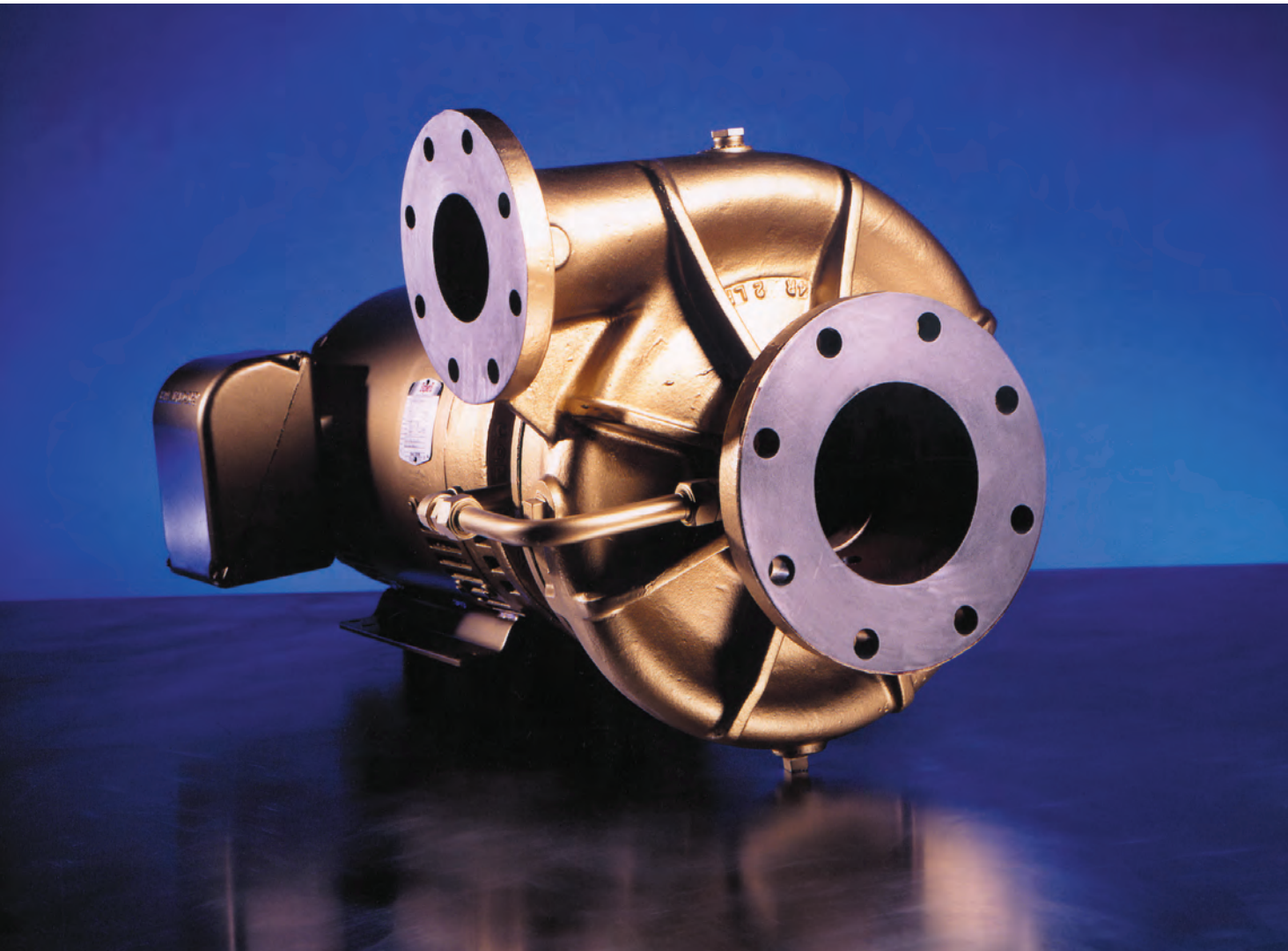
If you're trying to find an issue with the pump station, there are some common problem areas. Start with NPSHa. If the pump is starved to liquid cavitation, then a slew of other problems can ensue. Loose fittings and valves, incorrect pipe slope, or use of a concentric reducer (when you should be using an eccentric reducer) can allow air to entrain and bind the system. The presence of enough air in the system will affect pump performance.

When troubleshooting a pump station, more than **90% of the issues** we see are on the suction side.

Sometimes a change in conditions can cause a problem. If the vertical suction lift increases or you increase the flow in the system, pump performance can rapidly deteriorate. If everything performed well last season and you have performance problems at start-up this season, the first place to start is finding what's different. Was the suction pipe removed at any time during the offseason? Is the foot valve in good operating order? Do you need to tighten flanged bolts or replace flange gaskets in the suction-side piping? Make note and adjust the system as necessary.

Improperly supported pumps can vibrate, and that vibration can affect the suction and operation. Too much weight on the pump casing can also cause premature wear. Also, the suction pipe system should be sized for a water velocity of less than 7 feet per second, should approach the pump inlet with a straight run of at least four times the pipe diameter, and should reduce down at the pump inlet with an eccentric reducer with the flat side on top to prevent providing a spot for any entrained air to accumulate.

Remember that for a pump to perform as it was designed to perform, it must be given uninhibited access to all the water your system needs.



Pump manufacturers will provide curves that detail the performance of their pumps with a range called the best efficiency point listed. Try to stay within a window from 70% to the left to 120% to the right of BEP to get the most out of the pump. Photo: Cornell Pump Company

4 Simplify with remote monitoring

The Industrial Internet of Things has exploded during the last four years. You can now receive data from your pump remotely, checking conditions such as temperature, vibration, flow, pressure, drive, hours run or out-of-parameter conditions. Even GPS location can be accessed from hundreds of miles away. With the right components, users are able to start and stop the system with an IIoT module without traveling to a client's property to turn on a pump.

Many of the IIoT systems also alarm if conditions are not where they are supposed to be, allowing a user to save a pump, motor or system before a problem becomes catastrophic.

With machine learning, IIoT allows predictive maintenance recommendations. Making downtime

less frequent provides savings costs. Catching problems when they are minor and easy to fix is always better than when they'll mean large time and capital expenses.

And hey, we've beat the NPSH drum a bunch. IIoT can give your conditions and plot it right away so you can see what's going on. Check with the pump manufacturer about the IIoT solutions they provide.

5 Check for proper submergence

Proper submergence is required to stop vortexing, which can make the pump lose prime, reduce head, reduce flow, lower efficiency and cause noise. The amount of submergence needed is a function of pumping flow and suction pipe inlet diameter. Remember that it is possible to be drawing air into the suction inlet even if you don't see a

vortex, and other issues can increase the possibility of entraining air such as turbulence in the water source.

A suction bell reduces inlet losses and helps suppress vortexing as well. A basket screen may be used. The open area should be at least four times the pipe area. The screen opening size must be less than the maximum solid passing capacity of the system. Avoid use of very fine screen; it will plug easily and possibly collapse. If very small particles must be avoided, consider the use of another type of protection. The screen is also a safety feature should someone fall or swim close to the suction inlet.

6 Stay on the curve Pump manufacturers publish curves that detail the performance of their pumps, and there should be one available for every pump you have installed. The manufacturers will call out a best efficiency point. This is the area where a pump operates optimally for its design. However, on many pumps BEP is a very small part of the operating range, and you may not run near that point. If you are not operating at BEP, you should stay in a window within 70% to the left (generally higher heads/low

flows) through 120% to the right (generally lower heads and higher flows) of BEP. If you stay within that operating envelope, you will generally have lower fuel costs due to pump efficiency, smoother operation performance and less wear on parts.

While operating a pump at flow too far above BEP can cause cavitation, operating a pump at a flow too far below BEP can cause cavitation in some cases as well due to recirculation in the impeller. If you are not sure if a zone you want to run alone is too low on flow for the pump, listen to your pump. If the pump begins to run rough or vibrate when you drop down to that flow, then you know you need to increase the flow somehow. The closer to the BEP the better.

We hope that 2021 is a great irrigating year for everyone and that our tips help keep your pumps running smoothly. 🌱

Bob Jansen is recently semiretired from Cornell Pump Company and has worked in the pump industry for more than 40 years. Eric Holtan, agricultural market manager for Cornell Pumps, has more than 18 years of experience.



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CASE STUDY

Environmental Enhancements developed an organic approach for sustainable landscaping.

BY KATIE NAVARRA



GROWING ORGANICALLY



Fred Peratt, head coach and owner of Environmental Enhancements, regularly attends his homeowner association clients' landscape committee meetings. He looks at participating in the meetings as more than just a chance to hear what is going well (or not) on a site. He's even found ideas for differentiating his business from competitors and has identified opportunities for new revenue streams.

Conversations at an HOA landscape committee meeting eight years ago prompted the Sterling, Virginia, company to build its organic lawn care program. A resident of the community was adamantly against all chemicals and synthetic fertilizers. She called on the condo community to solely use organic products on its 25-acre property.

"That meeting provoked me to think about it and figure out how we could be innovative and adaptive by incorporating organics into the business," he says.

For this client, all organic was the only option. Peratt believes there is a middle ground between synthetics and all organic materials, but he recognized an opportunity to embrace sustainability through organic programs.

The company had already embraced organic products in its tree and shrub care program and perimeter control services for mosquitos and ticks. Being open to sustainable practices is central to Peratt's long-term goals for the full-service business that offers landscape maintenance, design and installation, irrigation, and snow removal services. Currently, the \$4 million company employs 40 people who work at HOA sites, retail centers, commercial office buildings, data centers and retirement communities. He plans to double both figures in the next five years.

"We are always looking for new ways to do things rather than just doing them the way we're used to," he says.

AN UPHILL BATTLE

Peratt acknowledges that offering an organic program can be an uphill battle. To date, about 15% of his clients are using an organic program. Most customers skip to the bottom-line cost. They see that an organic program is initially about 20% more than a traditional program and don't consider long-term savings and environmental impact.

Pilot programs are one strategy Peratt has used to encourage customers to sign onto organic programs. The first was a 3-acre condo complex in Reston, Virginia, where the grass was a vivid green and there was not a single weed. Environmental Enhancements was already using an organic tree and shrub care strategy there. The integrated pest management program relied on scouting and organic oils, limiting the use of control products.



Environmental Enhancements developed a three-year plan to go fully organic on its inputs for this Reston, Virginia, property. Improving the soil health was vital to the process.



Even before building an organic program for lawns, Environmental Enhancements had used those products for its tree and shrub care.

“We told them not to have great expectations in the first year, that it would be a 3-year transition. We said there would likely be weeds, and we could come in with soft chemistry if needed,” he says. “The committee had to get board approval and there was some arguing, but they decided to give it a try.”

Improving soil health is central to the success of an organic program. Peratt’s crews started with collecting soil samples from random spots across the property. The soil pH was in the mid-5 range with the optimum being in mid-6s. Local regulations limit annual lime applications, so it took two years to alter the soil pH. Aerating, overseeding and the use of soil enhancers to improve permeability are also integral to an organic program.

As predicted, Peratt received complaints about weeds. He reminded the board of their initial discussion and reemphasized patience. Soft chemistries were applied to treat the weeds and keep the clients happy. Results began appearing in year two: The turf was spreading and becoming denser. Not only were the plants and soil healthier, but the thick grass choked out weeds.

“Going into the second year, we said ‘We don’t want to use soft chemistry.’ We had a few weeds that second year, but no complaints,” he says. “By the third year, the property was on a totally organic program that did not require the use of any bridge products.”

Peratt never did raise the price for that Reston location, even as the program began to show successful results.

“We felt that they needed to reap some of those benefits, but we did show them the difference in cost,” he says. “Like any process, it takes time. People don’t like time because they want to minimize complaints and then waffle on their decision. They now realize after three seasons that it was the right choice.”

“
PROPERTY MANAGERS AND ENGINEERS ARE ALWAYS LOOKING AT SUSTAINABILITY, ESPECIALLY FROM A WATER-USAGE STANDPOINT.

– Fred Peratt,
 Environmental Enhancements

”



Regular soil tests are central to the company’s approach. The state only requires a soil test every three years. Peratt believes that is not often enough when trying to make soil changes through organic programs. They test five to six random turf areas and three to four tree or shrub areas on a property each year.

“The soil test will tell us what to do for the specific property program, and it could potentially change every year based on the soil test results,” he says. “We have to evaluate and make recommendations to tweak certain applications.”

CUSTOMER EDUCATION

Increasing conversations about sustainability doesn’t always translate to action when it comes with a higher cost. Educating customers about the benefits of an organic program is crucial. Peratt has heavily invested in marketing initiatives to highlight the benefits of organics.

Environmental Enhancements developed a brochure called “What’s In It For Your Community” and a Property Manager’s Guide, which explain the reasons for going organic. The pieces emphasize the safety benefits to people, pets and pollinators. It also includes examples of how organic programs support healthier plant growth and reduce overall maintenance costs.

“We have it broken down into four key components because you lose people when you start to talk science. When you start talking about soil and rhizomes you lose them, and they feel like you’re just feeding them stuff,” he says. “The brochure also includes an ‘Urgent Message from Fred’ where I talk about the benefits of organic programs.”

Peratt has also embraced video and digital marketing to get the message across. Inspired by the Netflix documentary, “Kiss the Ground,” Peratt began working with a marketing team to develop an

animated video of his own to promote the benefits of an organic program.

“We also developed a sales team to sell the program,” he says. “We have taught them how to present the benefits of an organic program and how to emphasize them when speaking to existing and future clients.”

SEAMLESS TRANSITION

Integrating an organics program into Environmental Enhancement’s traditional services lineup has been seamless, according to Peratt. From a labor perspective, no special training was necessary since the products are applied the same way as traditional applications. No special equipment or modifications to the trucks were needed either.

The company uses mobile time sheets so all employees have phones. They take photos of the property and upload them into the company’s database with a date and time stamp. The before and after photos offer dramatic comparisons to emphasize the effectiveness of an organic program. One difference Peratt has noticed is related to personal protective equipment requirements.

“There are fewer PPE requirements. Staff still wear gloves and boots, but the required protective gear is far less than when applying traditional chemicals,” he says. “I’m not sure if this will change as the government puts more focus on the chemicals or if it always will stay this way, but for now the products don’t carry the same warning labels.”

Working with the suppliers has been key to staying current on new products as they become available. When Peratt first introduced an organic program, he attended an educational event in Dallas and continues to follow changes to best practices as they emerge.

“Do your research with companies that have used organic programs, and understand the objections that you will get from clients and prospects,” he says. “Then do test pilot programs initially with documentation to support the program. Educate and openly communicate with your clients consistently.”

A SIGN OF THE TIMES

Peratt works in a highly regulated region. Maryland, Washington, D.C., and Virginia have strict requirements for lim-

iting fertilizer runoff to avoid polluting the Chesapeake Bay. Washington, D.C., has now instituted a noise ban, so Peratt is exploring options in battery-operated equipment for the accounts he has there. Rather than seeing the restrictions as negatives, he recognizes the opportunities.

“Property managers and engineers are always looking at sustainability, especially from a water-usage standpoint,” he says. “We talk about how our programs can help them meet those goals and add value.”

Water savings are top of mind concerns for property managers, and Peratt encourages them to consider organics as a way to reduce water usage. Healthier soils and lawns are more efficient at holding water leading to less water consumption through irrigation. To help commercial clients see this benefit, Peratt has launched a second pilot program using a smart controller app.

“We can now monitor specific areas and increase or decrease them based on weather and moisture levels,” he says. “It has been a great addition to our properties for the long-term ROI in water savings.”

Organics were Peratt’s entry point into offering sustainable lawn care practices. It was a step that didn’t require investment in new equipment or extensive training though it has taken time to scale up. But with an increasing focus on sustainable practices in the lawn care industry, taking the first step was the most important one. The company has concentrated on evaluating fuel efficiency and building denser markets and routing. They’re also looking at idling of the vehicles, and how electric cars could become an option for sales representatives.

“Sustainability is part of our mission and organics are a part of that,” he says.

If Peratt could turn back time, he would have been more diligent in developing a complete plan that encompassed research, development, documentation, marketing and sales initiatives. It was new for the company and there was not much data related to organics, so they were taking one step forward and many steps back.

“We thought the program would be a home run immediately, and we now know it is a long uphill process that takes tremendous commitment,” says Peratt. 🌱

The author is a freelance writer in Mechanicville, New York, and can be reached at ktnavarra@gmail.com.



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Wonderful

WATER FEATURES

Use water features to bring out the best in the design of an outdoor living space.

By Lindsey Getz

Water features can be a thoughtful and exciting addition to a landscape design. Contractors already have the technical know-how in terms of what it takes to install these features.

The key is determining how they best fit into the landscape design, as there is certainly an art to incorporating these elements. Whether it's a small bubbler, a larger fountain or maybe even a pondless waterfall, with some forethought and planning, these can be an amazing value-add for clients.

Mason Shaffer, landscape designer with Blanchford Landscape Group in Bozeman, Montana, says that helping clients choose the water feature that is right for their property comes down to understanding their wants and needs. An expansive property might warrant a large statement piece such as the Italian-style, three-tiered fountain Shaffer designed into a Tuscan-style landscape in Bozeman. However, small water features can still make a big impact. In a small garden space, a bubbler can be an optimal addition.

Location is also key. According to Mary Dresser, RLA, ALSA, a landscape architect with Earth, Turf, & Wood Inc., located in Denver, Pennsylvania, determining where a water feature is best suited on any given property comes down to figuring out the "why" behind the reasoning for the feature in the first place. Is it strictly visual or is the client also attempting to filter out some noise? Do they already envision it somewhere on the property or do they just know they want one? After fully understanding the client's wants and needs, Dresser says she will then consider the functional and spatial definition of the landscape design and where the water feature might fit best.

"Ideally, we want to situate the water feature somewhere that it can be enjoyed on more than one level," Dresser says. "For instance, if we can design and install it where it can be seen from certain windows of the house, it will get so much more enjoyment."

Often, clients don't specifically ask for a water feature, but Dresser says that listening closely is important. Sometimes what the client is describing might mean a water feature would be a great fit, even if they do not explicitly ask for it.

Alyson Landmark, CNLP, landscape designer with Southview Design in St. Paul, Minnesota, says if clients have a property that would be well-suited to a water fea-



Photos: Blanchford Landscape Group

“THE SOOTHING SOUND OF FLOWING WATER IS A KEY BENEFIT OF WATER FEATURES. IT REDUCES STRESS AND ENHANCES THE OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE.

— Alyson Landmark,
Southview Design

ture and if it seems to fit in with their wants and needs, she might suggest it to gauge the client's interest. Like Dresser, Landmark agrees that the benefits of the water feature can be maximized with proper location. Making the water feature a focal point of the landscape design in terms of visuals is important, but it should also be in a place where its sound can be enjoyed, particularly if that's important to the client.

“The soothing sound of flowing water is a key benefit of water features,” Landmark says. “It reduces stress and enhances the outdoor experience.”

And, as Dresser points out, it can also have an impact on minimizing other noises. She completed one water feature design for clients who were looking for a way to ignore the sound of cars from the nearby highway.

Shaffer adds that water features can be excellent additions to courtyards or near a garden wall, where that sound can reverberate. He shares an example of a water feature he incorporated into a private townhome courtyard space, where the homeowners could often hear others talking. It helped to create a sense of privacy and seclusion.



Even a small water feature such as a bubbler can provide a visual impact in a landscaped area along with sound cover to filter out other noise.

Smart water use in water features

These days people are more conscious than ever of smart water use. While water features aren't generally a heavy draw on water, it's important to talk to clients about making these elements even more water-use friendly.

According to Mason Shaffer, landscape designer with Blanchford Landscape Group in Bozeman, Montana, a pondless waterfall using a pondless basin is a great way to achieve smart water use. There is always a little bit of splash to consider, but it helps minimize evaporation since not all of the water is exposed to the elements. A pondless waterfall also helps to keep algae down and is generally preferred because of its lower maintenance nature.

Alyson Landmark, CNLP, landscape designer with Southview Design in St. Paul, Minnesota, says that most clients are already sensitive to water usage because of the rising cost of water. However, she says that clients often do not understand just how much water can be lost to splash and evaporation. The more spillways you design in the feature, the more water you will lose, so this is an important consideration.

“If there is already an irrigation system present in the landscape, we like to tie the water feature into it and use an auto-fill so that it's not running out of water and the client is having to go out and refill it,” Landmark says. “At the very least, this is lessening the amount of work that the client has to do in terms of keeping the feature running.”

CONSIDERING LOGISTICS

While it's clear there is an artistic element to incorporating water features, there are also important logistics. Shaffer says that a consideration that is often overlooked is simply installing the feature near a power source.

“It's nice if you already have a power source nearby, otherwise you'll need to hire an electrician to pull power to the feature,” says Shaffer. “You'd have to be dealing with extension cords, which can be an eyesore.”

Dresser adds that sometimes the lay of the land can be an obstacle to overcome. If the client envisions a waterfall but has a very flat property, Dresser says you have to be sure you create the proper stage for it to prevent it from being awkward.

Krisjan Berzins, owner of Kingstowne Lawn & Landscape in Alexandria, Virginia, says that some properties are more naturally suited to water features than others.

“With waterfalls, in particular, when you can incorporate them into a naturally sloped property, it doesn't feel as though you're forcing it into the topography,” he says. “If there is a low area in the property that already tends to be wet and has water running through it, this could naturally lend itself into creating a water feature that works with the existing landscape.”

Of course, Berzins says that smaller fountains or bubbling urns can be incorporated into some softscaping or hardscaping without needing to take the topography into account.

Shaffer says that it's also important to consider water plants as they can serve not only an aesthetic purpose but an important functional one, too.

“If you're creating medium-sized water features, you want to be sure to develop some shelf areas where you can have plant life grow at different heights,” he says. “This looks and feels right but it also serves the functional purpose of helping steal nutrients from algae and keeping the water shaded to prevent evaporation.”

WATER FEATURE TRENDS

Over the years, water feature trends have evolved. There was a time, says Landmark, when larger ponds, such as those with koi, were trending. But fast-forward about 10 years to present day, and the majority of clients who are interested in water features are looking for something low-maintenance.

“I think people started to realize how much work a pond can be,” she says. “For the most part, people have largely moved away from requesting these. Occasionally, there will be a client who enjoys the idea of caring for a pond. But most people are looking for something low-maintenance.”

Berzins says that there aren't many companies who provide pond or water feature maintenance, so most clients want something that isn't going to end up being a lot of work.

In terms of design trends, Berzins says there's always a place for natural, free-flowing design, but there's currently more interest in a contemporary, modern style of water feature. It all comes down to the property and the client's wishes. There's also been some interest in combining fire elements and water features for something highly unique.

Earth, Turf, & Wood's Dresser has also worked with the latest “fire and water trend,” and in fact has custom-designed a unique feature that incorporated both. The clients wanted it centered on a patio so it could also be viewed and enjoyed from the kitchen window and their adjoining screen porch. Dresser says that custom features aren't right for everyone as they don't always fit the budget, but on the right property it can be an amazing addition. In general, it comes back to fitting the landscape as a whole.

Landmark says this is ultimately the bottom line of water features: They must fit within the style of the landscape.

“No matter what water feature you ultimately decide to do, it must fit, not look like it was just added there as an afterthought,” she says. “If it's a modern landscape, it should be a modern water feature, and if it's a more naturalistic space, it might be more of a natural design. In the end, it should look like it was meant to be there.”

Lindsey Getz is a contributing editor to *Irrigation & Green Industry* and can be reached at lindsey.getz@yahoo.com.

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One step

By Kyle Brown

ahead



Beat summer weeds with preemergent strategies before they become a problem.

As the weather starts to warm up, landscape and irrigation professionals are getting ready to get back to their clients' lawns. But they're not the only ones eager to make their mark on a developing yard this spring. Summer weeds are ramping up just as quickly, and the early months of the season are key to keeping the grass clear of these invaders. Here are a few common opponents, including how to stay ahead of them.





Photo: Bert McCarty

Crabgrass

Landscapers and homeowners alike are familiar with crabgrass, as it's one of the more common backyard invaders in much of the U.S. As the grass grows in, it has a light green or bluish green color, generally without stolons or rhizomes, says Bert McCarty, professor of turfgrass science and management at Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina. A telltale sign is the seed head, which can spread out with what look like fingers, part of what earned it the name *Digitaria*.

"Most homeowners recognize that seed head," says McCarty. "That might be good, that could get you a new customer."

Dealing with crabgrass can be a challenge, but preemergent applications can help keep it under control. Look to put that down when soil temperatures at a 4-inch depth reach about 53 degrees for a full day, which is when crabgrass will really begin to germinate, McCarty says. In his region, that's usual-

ly about the third week of March, but that will differ by climate. Some of the more commonly used products include active ingredients such as dithiopyr or prodiamine. Different active ingredients provide different modes of action in taking care of the weed, so try to switch between multiple options with repeated applications. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for application, including watering in the product if necessary. Prodiamine will need a repeat application in about 75 days. If the weather throughout summer tends to be more rainy, another application might be necessary.

Management practices can be helpful in crowding out crabgrass with more healthy grass, and research has shown that taller fescue can reduce the amount of crabgrass that can compete, says McCarty. When mowed at a height of 1 inch for the summer, the fescue patch was 80% crabgrass. That dropped to 70% at 2 inches and 25% at 3 inches. At 4 inches, only 5% of the patch was crabgrass. But convincing a homeowner to let grass grow a little taller to block weeds might be a challenge.

Wild violet

In the Midwest, wild violet is one perennial wildflower most landscapers are familiar with as a common yard invader. It thrives in moist, shady areas but can definitely tolerate drought conditions as well. It'll do especially well anywhere where grass is





It's not easy work, but for some weeds like sandbur and wild violet, pulling by hand can be an effective spot treatment.

thin and sparse, says Gared Shaffer, extension weeds field specialist at the South Dakota State University Extension, Aberdeen, South Dakota. Look for curled, heart-shaped leaves growing in bunches and for it to spread like other wildflowers through root systems. But the purple flower is what will set it off from other plants in the landscaped area.

There are multiple chemical options for handling wild violet, including products with mecoprop, dicamba or triclopyr. Most of those will take repeated applications, as wild violet can be a tough weed, especially once it's fully established, Shaffer says. After an application, check back on the weed in about two weeks. If it's still showing signs of growth, it could be time for another application.

Maintaining healthy, dense turf is one of the best approaches for crowding out wild violet. Keep an eye on patches of grass that seem to be a little weaker, as those will be where perennials like these will target, says Shaffer. Pulling the weeds by hand here with a small shovel is another solid option, as long as you're able to get the entire root system.



Photo: Bert McCarty

Dandelion

Dandelions are another weed that homeowners can pick out from a distance, with the signature yellow flower and white puffball seed head. But even before flowering, it has distinctive, serrated leaves, says McCarty. It can have a prostrate growth habit along the ground coming out of a central terminal bud with leaves that flop over.

There aren't really preemergent herbicides that will do much to cover dandelions, which are perennials and will generally be a nuisance year-round unless you really go after them, says McCarty. When you do notice them in a lawn, there are several three-way active ingredient mixes that can be effective. It can be helpful to include a herbicide that will put some extra pressure on the weed like fluroxypyr.

For good coverage of dandelions, it will often take two applications of a herbicide mix about 10 days apart. That can be tough for lawn care operators, as

many clients don't want to have crews making multiple trips and applications to the yard. In those cases, it might be helpful to move up the rate slightly, he says.

"That may not kill the dandelion, but it'll knock it down to a point that the homeowner is generally pretty happy with it," McCarty says. That works especially well if the client will tolerate slightly taller mowing heights, which will both help hide the dandelion and crowd it out with more healthy grass.

Sandbur

In the southern U.S., sandbur is a common summer annual weed that has a very distinctive look, with painful, problematic seed pods that the grass gets its name for. As the weed comes up from the ground, it will have a maroon or purple base, says Zach Howard, extension program specialist at Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas. At shorter heights, the stem is fairly flat in comparison to other grasses, and it grows from a crown, unlike other turfgrasses that spread. If an area has had trouble with sandbur in the past, make certain to check it during green-up in the next year, as it's likely to continue.

"Typically there are burs in that area from years past, and they don't break down easily," says Howard. "A lot of times what you're finding is seed from two or three years ago that's actually germinating."

Sandbur will favor areas that are already receiving fertilizer and regular irrigation, so most landscaped areas are targets for the weed, he says.

It's not flashy, but pulling up sandbur by hand is the best way to deal with it and give the surrounding lawn the chance to outcompete it. One chemical control for the weed is indaziflam, as long as it's applied early in the season to problem areas as sandbur is germinating, he says. Look for a soil temperature approaching 70 degrees as a sign that it's time to watch for new growth.

Sandbur does provide lawn care operators with one effective way to deal with it, thanks to its own strategies for spreading. "You can use the fact that they're burs to your advantage," says Howard. If an area is infested with sandbur, take a piece of carpet or a material that they can hook onto and roll it or lay it across the grass. Lift the carpet away, and that



Photo: Casey Reynolds

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should pull a good number of the burs along with it. Black landscape cloth can be useful as well in keeping the burs from finding a place to germinate. It's also important for lawn care operators to check their own clothes as they work around areas with sandbur to make certain that they're not carrying it to other parts of the lawn or even other properties throughout the day.



Photo: Bert McCarty

Lespedeza

Common *Lespedeza* is a nuisance that sometimes shows up in yards using centipedegrass, a low-maintenance, warm-season grass in the South. *Lespedeza* isn't just another grass like some other weeds, but a legume that can make its own nitrogen. One of centipedegrass's defining characteristics is that it doesn't need much nitrogen to thrive, where many other plants like having more of it around. In a low-nitrogen situation, however, *Lespedeza* brings its own supply and can carve out a niche where it can be a strong competitor to centipedegrass, says McCarty.

Lespedeza leaves are ovate in shape, meaning slightly egg-shaped with the broader end toward the base. McCarty says one telltale sign is parallel venations on the leaf that come off at 45-degree angles to the midrib. As the plant matures, its stems are tougher and more wood-like, and the plant produces a light purple flower.

Going after *Lespedeza* early is key to keeping it under control, he says. As it gets into summer and the stems grow tougher, it can be difficult to knock back even with herbicide applications. In May or June, products with metsulfuron can be effective in controlling it. Once the plant has matured somewhat, it will also likely take a product with fluroxypyr in combination to keep it in check.

Raising the mowing height on the centipedegrass can be helpful, but its relative low need for inputs like nitrogen can be a double-edged sword when dealing with *Lespedeza*, says McCarty. Adding more nitrogen can make the weed less competitive, but it can make the centipedegrass more susceptible to winter damage. Stick to about 1 to 2 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year on those areas to provide some growth.



Photo: Matthew Elmore

Ground ivy

Ground ivy, another perennial broadleaf weed seen in several areas of the U.S., goes by multiple names. Where Shaffer is from in South Dakota, it often gets called creeping Charlie. It tends to like moist, rich soils in well-fertilized and irrigated areas with some shade or full sun, producing roundish, green leaves and a purplish flower from a square stem. It spreads through an aggressive stolon across the top of the ground, and even with lower mowing heights, it can tolerate the damage and come back just as strong, he says. It prefers areas where the lawn has seen some damage or is already weakened and can grow into a dense mat to crowd out other plants.

Maintaining a taller mowing height will help keep control of ground ivy, but there are also multiple chemical options to handle it. Look for active ingredients such as flumioxazin or isoxaben to suppress it from spreading. Sulfentrazone will also knock it back effectively, but watch for eventual chemical resistance after repeated applications. While that's more common on heavily manicured grass like golf courses, it can be a problem on home lawns as well.

Slender aster

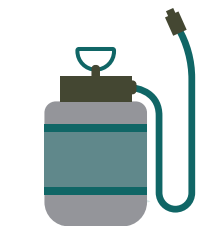
Slender aster is a broadleaf weed that shows up in the southern U.S. that tends to favor well-fertilized and irrigated areas, says Howard. Early on in germination, look for a cluster of leaves coming up that have a lance shape. As it grows, it develops a more spindly shape, with tougher, wiry stems that end in a white or purple flower with a yellow center.

Multiple chemical options cover slender aster, including both indaziflam and pendimethalin, Howard says. Applying on an annual basis in late spring or early summer should help keep the weed under control. But like others, one of the best ways to deal with it and make certain it stays out of the area is to pull it up by hand. Landscaping cloth with mulch over it can also help keep it out of flower beds as well.



Photo: Casey Reynolds

The author is editor-in-chief of *Irrigation & Green Industry* and can be reached at kylebrown@igin.com.



Use multiple modes of action with chemical applications to reduce the chances for resistance.

By the numbers

Chemical products, including fungicides, fertilizers, herbicides and insecticides, are some of the most important tools for landscape professionals in dealing with the common pests that plague lawns. We asked our readers for feedback to uncover the larger trends of how they choose which inputs to purchase and apply.

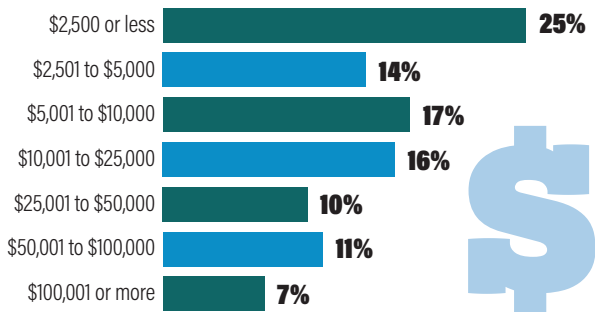
Our survey tracked contractors across specialties, with slightly more covering residential properties than commercial. Across the board, the total annual budget for chemical products generally wasn't a major chunk of the company's overall spend, with a quarter dedicating \$2,500 or less. A total of 33% spend between \$5,000 and \$25,000 annually on chemical products, and slightly fewer respondents (28%) spend more than \$25,000.

Authorized distributors and dealers of chemical products should feel proud of their market saturation, as 85% of respondents go straight to them for what they need. Big box stores might seem like a potential threat when it comes to purchasing equipment, but they only pulled 6% here.

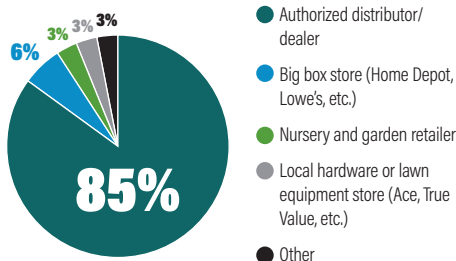
In choosing the right chemical product for the job, respondents most often look for quality (92%) and reliability (91%) as the most important factors. Rounding out the top three is the product's safety at 81%.

While chemical regulations have been a struggle for a fifth of respondents, three-quarters have found ways to continue operations alongside those rules. That's encouraging, as chemical regulations continue to be enacted across the country with different levels of stringency. Just 5% of respondents are facing no regulations on chemical products at all.

What is your business's total annual budget for turf and ornamental management chemicals, including fungicide, fertilizer, herbicide and insecticide?



Where does your business typically buy turf and ornamental management chemicals?



READ THE FULL REPORT ONLINE

To dig deeper into the details, including information on much contractors are spending on individual segments, head to www.igin.com/2021-chemical-product-survey.



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IA's Leadership Summit shows the way

Landscape and irrigation professionals picked up new industry insights and leadership skills at the 2021 virtual Leadership Summit hosted by the Irrigation Association, Fairfax, Virginia. The event brought together executives and top business experts to discuss what it takes to be successful at the head of your team and projects.

Following the keynote by Kelly Schulz, Maryland secretary of commerce, four industry leaders came together on a panel moderated by John Farner, IA industry development director, to talk about how leadership affects resilience within an organization, especially while working through the COVID-19 pandemic. Part of that discussion focused on what makes it important to be involved with industry associations as a leader.

"We decided that it was important to have a voice," says Jon Topham, CAIS, CID, chief operating officer for Irrigation Design & Construction LLC, Patterson, California, and past president of the Irrigation Association. Though it can be easy to hang back and let others make decisions, sharing ideas and promoting what makes the most sense for your team is critical.



The panel covered a wide range of topics, including the best methods to develop and share company culture with acquisitions as well as ways to solicit and work with feedback from team members and employees.

"I think the biggest thing in leadership is touchpoints – how we can take ourselves out of the day-to-day of leading, going back and empathizing and talking to our direct reports and our peers, and trying to find out avenues to help them be successful," says Doug York, president and CEO of Ewing Irrigation & Landscape Supply, Phoenix.

When it comes to work-life balance and company structure during the pandemic, it's important to remember that all employees have perspectives on what works for them, says Greg Hunter, CEO at Hunter Industries, San Marcos, California.

"Everybody's experiencing this very differently," he says. "Some people are doing well, some people are struggling."

Even when a leader doesn't know all the answers or is new to the industry, it can be a chance to let employees show their expertise, says Michael Hemman, president and CEO of Netafim, Fresno, California.

"It's also a great opportunity to empower your employees, and ask your employees to provide input as well," he says. "Most of the answers are there. They're in the field, they're in the manufacturing site. People are just waiting to be asked and to be able to provide their input."

The event also featured panels on leadership communication strategies, technology and the future of global business, and success in a post-pandemic world.

For more information on upcoming Irrigation Association conferences, visit www.irrigation.org/virtualconferences.

IA mourns passing of Rain Bird CEO Tony LaFetra

The Irrigation Association, Fairfax, Virginia, mourns the death of an industry icon, Tony LaFetra. LaFetra was the president and CEO of Rain Bird Corporation, Azusa, California.

"Tony embodied our industry's commitment to innovation, conservation and entrepreneurship," says Irrigation Association CEO Deborah Hamlin, CAE, FASAE. "He not only challenged Rain Bird, but all of us, to do the best we can to elevate the industry and of course use water intelligently."

LaFetra first joined the business in 1964, serving as a plant manager and later taking on the roles of vice president of sales and marketing and then executive vice president. In 1978, he succeeded his mother, Rain Bird's co-founder, Mary LaFetra, as president and CEO.

During his years at Rain Bird, he led the company's transformation from a manufacturer of brass impact sprinklers, primarily used in agriculture, to a provider of irrigation products used worldwide in landscapes, golf courses, sports fields and farms.

His tenure was highlighted by innovations that revolutionized the irrigation industry, from the world's first computerized central control system for irrigation management in the 1970s to the launch of subsurface drip irrigation. In 2002, he was honored with the IA's Industry Achievement Award.



LaFetra represented Rain Bird and the irrigation industry with a passion not only for efficient irrigation but also as an advocate for education and giving back to the community. The industry and his community benefitted greatly from his many contributions, and his presence will be missed.

Echo becomes the exclusive partner of NALP's Latino Landscape Network

The National Association of Landscape Professionals, Fairfax, Virginia, announced that Echo Incorporated, Lake Zurich, Illinois, has become the exclusive partner of the Latino Landscape Network.

The Latino Landscape Network (formerly the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance) connects and empowers the community of 500,000 Latino landscape professionals in the United States.

The Network, powered by Echo, supports Latino landscape professionals by working with NALP to help develop training materials and resources and provide networking and mentoring opportunities that help advance Latino businesses and employees.

"It's an honor to partner with NALP on this important initiative. The professional landscaping industry is comprised of a huge Latino population — from business owners to pros working across all segments of the industry," says Wayne Thomsen, vice president of marketing and product management for Echo.

NALP also advocates for the industry and amplifies the voice of Latino landscapers with legislators at the state, local and federal levels.

"Latino landscape professionals are critical to the success of our industry," says NALP CEO Britt Wood. "We applaud Echo for their commitment to the Latino landscape community, and we look forward to working together to provide new resources to help people advance their careers and grow their businesses."

STMA Student Challenge goes online

The Sports Turf Managers Association, Lawrence, Kansas, held its 2021 Student Challenge virtually this year, including an online exam and an oral presentation.



The test consisted of multiple choice questions and identification of turfgrasses, turfgrass weeds, insects and diseases. The oral presentation required students to work together to find a solution to an issue many sports field managers are experiencing as a result of the pandemic. They developed plans to approach the addition of fall sports to the spring season in a northern climate where soils may still be frozen and snow may still be present early in the season.

Two two-year teams and six four-year teams competed for \$5,000 awards in each division. Brandon Carbery and Ryan Geils of the University of Maryland won the two-year competition. Tyler Johnson, Jacob Hess and Ben Word of the University of Maryland won the four-year competition.

STMA's Student Challenge is presented by the SAFE Foundation, founding partner Hunter Industries and supporting sponsor Ewing Irrigation & Landscape Supply.

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1 Irrigation controller. K-Rain Manufacturing, Riviera Beach, Florida, released its new SiteMaster 2-wire decoder controller. The SiteMaster offers a 99-zone capability and is designed for large commercial, industrial and residential irrigation sites.

The SiteMaster uses a single 2-wire communication path and addressable decoders to control valves, pump starts and flow sensors. This provides a higher zone/station capacity, and decoders can be placed at great distances away from the controller — up to 2.8 miles away with a fully loaded 99-zone system. The result is savings on wire and installation labor since all the valves share the same 2-wire path.

The SiteMaster is available in either a stainless-steel cabinet or on a stainless-steel pedestal, and it includes a large display screen, full keyboard and easy programming dial.

 **K-Rain Manufacturing**
www.krain.com



2 Stump removal. Fecon, Lebanon, Ohio, has upgraded its Stumpex auger-type stump grinder to include a two-speed hydraulic motor for faster stump removal, especially on soft woods.

Designed to maximize 100% of machine output, the Stumpex 2-speed improves cut time by up to 50%, removing 24-inch stumps in less than three minutes. In addition to faster stump processing, the new model reduces wear on blades and cones, allowing longer service life and extending the intervals between blade sharpening. It is ideal for skid steer loaders and compact tracked loaders with 60-plus horsepower.

With no chips or debris strewn about, the low-speed high-torque auger-type technology is a safe method of stump removal with minimal maintenance required. With all debris contained in one area, cleanup is fast.

 **Fecon**
www.fecon.com



3 Loader. Mecalac, Norfolk, Massachusetts, introduces the AS900tele swing loader. The new machine combines the compactness and mobility of Mecalac's AS Swing Loader series with telescopic technology to provide versatility.

The AS900tele has a carrying capacity of 5,004 pounds at full extension and a lifting height of 15.5 feet and outreach of 11.5 feet. The 22.2 gpm auxiliary hydraulics further increase flexibility, allowing use with a range of attachments, including mowers, road sweepers and earth augers. Functioning as a loader, telehandler or landscaping tool, the AS900tele reduces the need for additional equipment.

The 8-ton AS900tele features Mecalac's innovative swing design. Operators can swivel the fully loaded bucket 90 degrees on either side. The unit's telescoping capabilities pair reach with power for flexibility.

 **Mecalac**
www.mecalac.com

SUPPLIER IN THE NEWS

Stihl becomes the exclusive partner of NALP's Young Professionals Network

The National Association of Landscape Professionals, Fairfax, Virginia, announced that Stihl has become the exclusive partner of the association's Young Professionals Network.

NALP's Young Professionals Network provides a platform to connect, share experiences and exchange ideas with peers nationwide.

The Network, powered by Stihl, supports landscape, lawn care, irrigation, tree care and horticulture professionals who are building careers in the landscape industry.

"We are extremely pleased to be part of the association's new initiative. For more than 20 years Stihl has supported the NALP's college outreach through the National Collegiate Landscape Competition, and this new network is a natural extension of the effort to find, develop and support young professionals entering the landscape industry," says Roger Phelps,

corporate communications manager for Stihl. "We look forward to being a part of this exciting initiative."

Industry professionals under 40 years old are

encouraged to join the Network, participate in the Facebook group and subscribe to the popular Growing in the Green Industry podcast, a signature initiative of the Network.

"Stihl is a great industry champion that is committed to supporting the next generation," says NALP CEO Britt Wood. "From their support of high school programs, to the National Collegiate Landscape Competition, to the Young Professionals Network, they are committed to helping build a strong future for the landscape industry."





4 Spreader/sprayer. Turfco, Blaine, Minnesota, introduced its new T5000 spreader/sprayer high-capacity riding applicator. The T5000 is a scaled-up version of Turfco's T3100 mid-sized riding applicator.

The T5000 is built for larger properties, with its 60-gallon sprayer and 325-pound spreader capacity coupled with a 22-horsepower engine delivering speeds up to 7 mph. The steering wheel drive system provides stability on hills, eliminates turf-tearing and reduces training time. New operators can be trained and fully operational in less than a week.

The T5000's unique two-nozzle boomless spray system delivers an effective spray width of 10 feet. The boomless design eliminates some of the maneuverability challenges of spray booms, and the optional 3-in-1 tank covers up to 300,000 square feet per fill.



5 Software. Aspire Software, Chesterfield, Missouri, announced the latest iteration of its business management software: Aspire Evolution Release. This new version will bring a new user interface providing multiple user-friendly enhancements and a more seamless user experience.

The Evolution Release will not only bring an updated look and feel to the platform but will also improve the system's usability for a more seamless user experience. The platform's core functionality will remain the same, while gaining new enhancements such as streamlined navigation, powerful advanced search, enhanced dashboard and seamless estimating. The Evolution Release provides optimized scheduling, simplified time entry and an improved resource center.

New clients will have immediate access to the new user interface, along with comprehensive onboarding and training from the implementation team.



6 Zero-turn mower. Hustler Turf Equipment, Hesston, Kansas, updated its FasTrak commercial zero-turn mower. With three choices of deck size, the mower makes quick work of expansive areas and offers improved productivity for commercial mowers.

Now designed for commercial use, the FasTrak is equipped with 23-inch BigBite rear tires. The upgraded zero-turn also comes equipped with Kawasaki FT Commercial V-twin engines, which includes a vortical air filtration system. The FasTrak now has Hydro-Gear ZT-3200 transmissions across all model options. This mower's horsepower ranges from 22 to 27 across 48-, 54- and 60-inch model options. Also available on the 54- and 60-inch is the Kohler 7500 EFI engine with 27 horsepower.

Hustler Turf also offers an improved four-year, 750-hour warranty on the upgraded FasTrak.



SUPPLIER IN THE NEWS

AriensCo receives Wildlife Habitat Council Conservation Certification

AriensCo, Brillion, Wisconsin, received the Wildlife Habitat Council Conservation Certification for its work in restoring and conserving 150 acres of natural ecosystem at its headquarters. The conservation effort is expected to have positive benefits for the land and animals that call the habitat home.

AriensCo has committed to restoring about 86 acres of prairie oak savanna, a unique habitat that once thrived in the U.S. Midwest but is currently in peril. It is estimated that only 0.01% of Wisconsin's original 5.5 million acres of prairie oak savanna are left. The remaining 64 acres of the project will be comprised of forests and wetlands. All of the land is on property that AriensCo owns.

"The history of AriensCo and the history of Brillion, Wisconsin, are interconnected," says Dan Ariens, AriensCo chairman and CEO. "For five generations, the Ariens family

has invested in this great city that supports us. By restoring and preserving this natural habitat, future generations will be able to enjoy the many benefits of connecting with the natural ecosystem of Wisconsin."

AriensCo has already established 26 acres of prairie oak savanna and 24 acres of forests and wetlands, and in the coming years, it aims to establish an additional 60 acres of prairie oak savanna and 40 acres of woodlands, including 2.5 acres of both shallow and deep marshes.



PHOTO: ARIENSCO



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NAM AND MANUFACTURING INSTITUTE LAUNCH 'THIS IS OUR SHOT'

The National Association of Manufacturers, Washington, D.C., and the Manufacturing Institute, Washington, D.C., launched a new initiative to encourage manufacturing team members, their families and their communities to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

The "This Is Our Shot" effort has six main components:

1. science-based messaging research
2. emergency industry convening and education, such as webinars
3. online vaccine information hub
4. public service announcement campaign
5. yellow and red ribbon initiative (for vaccinated individuals to show their peers they're a part of the fight)
6. rapid response media and digital campaign

As part of this effort, NAM released its first PSA, "I Love Frank," that showcases why manufacturers are rolling up their sleeves to get a COVID-19 vaccine: to protect their family, co-workers and the people they love. Go to www.nam.org/thisisourshot to view this PSA and for more information about this project.



CICADAS TO EMERGE AFTER 17 YEARS UNDERGROUND



Trillions of cicadas are set to emerge across 15 different states in the spring. Known as Brood X cicadas, this colony of insects is awakening from a 17-year-long hibernation.

These insects are expected to appear for the first time since 2004 and will make their 2021 debut in Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia and Washington, D.C. They are believed to appear in huge numbers to overwhelm their predators.

These cicadas have spent the last 17 years underground in their immature nymph state eating tree root sap. They are expected to crawl out in mid-May to late June when soil hits 64 degrees and likely after a warm rain. Once above ground, there is no missing their presence, as their mating call can hit a noise level of 100 decibels.



TV VIEWERS DONATE LAWN EQUIPMENT AFTER THEFT

Television viewers of 7News in Pompano Beach, Florida, delivered a generous gesture to a landscaper who lost both his trailer and his livelihood, according to an article on wsvn.com. Scott Dillinger's trailer that was loaded with \$40,000 worth of lawn gear had been stolen.

Gina Villanell saw the story and knew she had to help. She donated a mower, a weed eater, a walk-behind spreader and a sprayer. "We all need to give back a little bit," Villanell said. "We need some more kindness in the world."

Villanell was not alone, and after the story first aired, several more strangers reached out to help by donating different types of equipment, even a trailer for his temporary use.

Dillinger said he never would have imagined this type of response. "I was getting phone calls the next day from people wanting to help and people bringing equipment," he said. "Luckily, my customers are holding on for me and just waiting for me to show up."



NFL'S OLDEST GROUNDSKEEPER TAKES TURF SERIOUSLY

If you watched the Super Bowl on Feb. 7, George Toma hopes you took a close look at the grass on the field. Toma is 92 years old, and he is the oldest groundskeeper in the NFL, according to an article on abc7chicago.com.

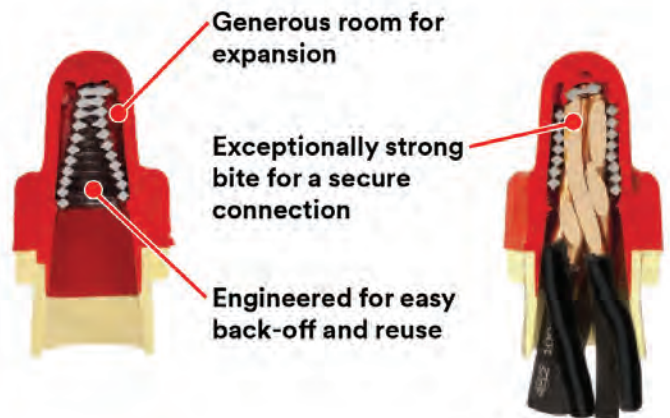
The game at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa was his 55th Super Bowl. His first was in 1967 at the Los Angeles Coliseum. Toma takes his turf very seriously, and his legendary field status has earned him the title of "Sod God."

Nothing seems to slow Toma down, not even the pandemic. He still works his day job on the field, while also keeping busy tending his own garden and playing with Dixie, the family dog.



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