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Business Strategies For Landscape Contractors

**Top Residential
Hardscaping Trends**

Page 24

CONTRACTOR PROFILE

NOT JUST ANOTHER NUMBER

**Greenscapes of Southwest Florida
has shifted its focus
from quantity to quality.**

Page 8

**Lawn Renovation
Rejuvenation** Page 12

**How To Grow Your
Lawn Renovation
Business** Page 16



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FEATURES

04 PRO Talk
The more things change the more versatile you have to be.

12 Lawn Renovation Rejuvenation
Four main drivers are leading aeration and other lawn renovation services to become a more requested and profitable component to an overall landscape maintenance plan.



12

16 How To Grow Your Lawn Renovation Business
Tips on getting started, sales and expansion

24 Top Residential Hardscaping Trends
The experts at Belgard Hardscapes talk about six key product trends, and the importance of a consistent sales and marketing process in this growingly competitive business.



24

CONTRACTOR PROFILE



8

Not Just Another Number

Greenscapes of Southwest Florida has shifted its focus from quantity to quality, rolling out several new initiatives designed to deepen client relationships and reinforce employee morale.

CONTRACTORS RANK HERBICIDES

Just Tell Me It Works

Intense brand loyalties are out the window as lawn care contractors simply want to cost-effectively and reliably control weeds.



20

ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

Hardscape Lessons to Preserve Your Profit
greenindustrypros.com/10742834

Top Commercial Hardscaping Trends
greenindustrypros.com/10742785

How To Eliminate Waste Through Process Mapping
greenindustrypros.com/10711978



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The more things change the more versatile you have to become

This year has been so bizarre that it's not unreasonable to conclude that the Mayans could be onto something. During the first month or two of 2012, we were all crying in our milk because of a lack of snowfall up north, or maybe a lack of rain if you're down in Florida. Then the early spring sprang and everybody was giddy with excitement. That lasted all of two months before an historic drought set in across the country. Back to crying in our milk we went.

Now that it's the end of August, how do you feel about where your company stands? Is your revenue up or down for the year? How about profits? What are you going to do to finish the year strong?

The contractors that can withstand unpredictable weather patterns, economic slowdowns and other "natural disasters" are the ones that don't put too many eggs in one basket. Many learned this lesson when the housing market collapsed a few years ago. Just think about how many installation contractors suddenly became your competitors in the maintenance arena.

While it's safe to say most contractors now understand that maintenance has to be part of a successful business model going forward, there is still more to it than that. Look at this summer's drought—which brought grass growth and lawnmower operation to a standstill in some regions. Many of the mow-blow-go guys have also been feeling the pinch this

season because they are too reliant on vigorous grass growth.

Lawn renovation services such as dethatching, aerating and overseeding can be a great way to supplement your maintenance business—especially during the fall season. Many contractors say customers are looking to have these services done again, after having put them on the sideline for the past couple of years. And considering the dry conditions many parts of the country have experienced this year, aerating is a service many property owners will be receptive to. Check out the lawn renovation features on pages 12 and 16 of this issue.

And despite what happened in 2008-2009, do not lose sight of the growing hardscape business. Contractors that are skilled, certified, and up on all of the latest hardscaping trends will have a competitive advantage as things continue to improve. Check out our "top residential hardscaping trends" feature on page 24.

The old saying is true: When it rains, it pours. And when it doesn't, it sure doesn't. As Mother Nature and whoever else continue to throw curve ball after curve ball at you, it's important to be versatile enough to adapt—and chase those sales dollars down, wherever they might be. ◀

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Business Strategies For Landscape Contractors

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Volume 24 Number 5





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What's This?

Visit greenindustrypros.com to search for the eight-digit code at the end of the news item and read the complete story.

Report Says Lawn Care Products Safe When Used Appropriately

A noted scientist and Harvard research manager recently conducted a review of four commonly used lawn care products. Her findings led to the conclusion that these products, when used appropriately, pose little danger for adverse health effects.

"I wouldn't hesitate to let my children and dogs play on a lawn where lawn care products have been used, as long as the products were applied according to their respective labels," said Katherine von Stackelberg, Sc.D (doctor of science), principal of E Risk Sciences and a research manager at the

Harvard Center for Risk Analysis.

As part of a series of studies commissioned by the Environmental Health Research Foundation (EHRF), von Stackelberg selected four of the most commonly used lawn care products. She reviewed them to evaluate the strength of the association between exposure and potential health effects.

She reviewed the toxicological, epidemiological and exposure data for bifenthrin; azoxystrobin; 2,4-D and MCPA (a member of the same chemical family as 2,4-D). **10719935**



LandOpt Continues to Expand Contractor Network

Founded in 1996 by owners Kevin and Dana Fontaine, Cary, NC-based **Fontaine Landscaping** is among the Triangle's premier solution providers for grounds management, lawn care and landscape enhancement. The company's focus is on maintenance services within both the residential and commercial markets, inclusive of private homes, multi-family units and HOA sites. **10690394**

Corion Landscape Management in Ferndale, WA, was founded in 2001 by owner David Arnold and is a comprehensive landscape management company that provides both maintenance and installation services. The company has earned a distinct reputation commercially in the multi-family market, primarily among condo associations and assisted living facilities. **10690394**

PLANET's 16th Annual Renewal & Remembrance Event

Green Industry Gives Back at Arlington Cemetery

PLANET held its 16th annual Renewal & Remembrance project at Arlington National Cemetery on July 9. The event brings hundreds of Green Industry Pros together to honor America's fallen heroes by helping to make the hallowed grounds even more beautiful. Check out the video at greenindustrypros.com/10741650.

Here are some facts about this year's event:

- 422 participants (including 48 children) donated their time to the one-day event

- 82 companies represented – including landscaping companies, equipment manufacturers, chemical and fertilizer manufacturers, and distributors
- 29 states represented
- 66 tons of lime applied to 150 acres
- 35 acres of turf aerated
- 100 native grasses and 50 native perennials planted
- Five trees pruned, cabled and braced
- Lighting protection for eight trees
- Irrigation system upgrades **10741688**

BLOG: Don't Punish Those Whose Dreams Come True

Should John Doe in Ohio, who started a lawn mowing business to get through college and now finds himself presiding over a \$6 million company, be punished? Should this same contractor be chastised and taxed into oblivion if he chooses to sell his company for 75 cents on the sales dollar? **10467843**

PRODUCT NEWS

The BackSaver Tailgate Assist System

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Each Client Services Team has two leaders: a client services manager and an operations supervisor.

Client
Services Manager

Not Just Another Number

Greenscapes of Southwest Florida has shifted its focus from quantity to quality, rolling out several new initiatives designed to deepen client relationships and reinforce employee morale.

When Bostonian Steve Pruchansky sold his furniture distribution business and retired to Florida, he had a feeling that boredom might set in after a while. He was right, and soon began looking for a business to invest in.

A business broker introduced Pruchansky to Linda Nelson, owner of Greenscapes of Southwest Florida. At that time (1991), Greenscapes was still a small company with just a couple of crews. Today it has more than 30, employing nearly 250 people during peak season.

The company has spent the past 20 years growing—and growing and growing. More recently, though, Pruchansky and Nelson have begun to adjust their priorities. “We’ve gone from a focus on quantity to a focus on quality,” Nelson says.

Quality, of course, has always been central to the Greenscapes mission. However, the tight economy has



Steve Pruchansky (CEO) and Linda Nelson (president) have been partners since 1991.

compelled the owners to embrace a much broader commitment. Both Nelson and Pruchansky have come to realize that, in the highly competitive world of commercial landscape maintenance, attentive service and deep client relationships have become invaluable tools in the quest for customer retention.

New approach to client management

Greenscapes has adopted a team approach to client service. This ensures that each property is visited more often. Plus, clients enjoy the benefit of contact continuity.

COMPANY DATA

GREENSCAPES OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

Naples, FL
greenscapesfl.com

Founded: 1962, new partners in 1991

Owners: Linda Nelson and Steve Pruchansky

Employees: 190 to 245

Service Mix: 74% commercial maintenance, 15% commercial installation, 6% commercial irrigation, 4% tree care, 1% commercial lawn care (IPM)

Equipment includes: Isuzu trucks, Dixie Chopper riding mowers, Stihl and Echo trimmers

Affiliations and Credentials include: Florida Turf Growers, Florida Nursery Growers & Landscape Association, ISA Certified Arborist, Florida Water Star Certification



Linda Nelson says there's just something about the color yellow. "It seems to put people in a good mood," she says. That's why she has all of her crews' trucks painted that color.

Each Client Services Team has two leaders: a client services manager and an operations supervisor. The services manager acts as the client's primary contact, helping establish the vision for the property. All seven of Greenscapes' client services managers have horticulture backgrounds.

The seven operations supervisors, each of whom communicates directly with their respective client services manager, are in charge of executing the vision on each property. Each operations manager oversees roughly 30 to 50 employees. The number and size of crews vary greatly, as some of Greenscapes' larger accounts require massive on-site crews of eight or more people.

Crews are not the only personnel to regularly visit properties. Both the client services manager and operations supervisor also make frequent visits. This helps improve quality and ensure that any issues are handled promptly. Additionally, Nelson has worked diligently to restructure routes so that any given crew is never more than 10-20 minutes away from any of its properties.

Client services managers conduct monthly horticulture reviews, which go directly to the operations supervi-

sors for implementation. Additionally, landscape audits are conducted annually, helping client services managers to work closely with clients to develop one-, three- and five-year landscape plans. Irrigation audits are conducted every two years.

Relationships that run deep

In commercial landscape maintenance, Pruchansky says it is no longer acceptable to simply provide great customer service. "You must enrich your client's landscape, constantly bringing them new ideas," Pruchansky adds. "People enjoy change in their landscapes—not in their service providers. Building relationships is the key to success."

In 2011, Greenscapes thanked 10-plus-year clients with a \$500 "Gift of Appreciation." Client services managers were empowered to work with clients on how to spend that

\$500, such as by planting a new tree. These long-term clients were also presented with a plaque.

Greenscapes specializes in homeowner associations and condos. It's a challenge, Nelson points out, to ensure that the actual residents don't feel like just another number, or that service providers don't really care about them individually. Greenscapes has hired someone to specialize in catering to this constituency. The new employee hangs door tags on the individual homes and condos, inviting residents to let the company know if they have any questions or concerns.

Greenscapes has also launched a new division for smaller enhancement-type projects. "We're going for the 'you're my gardener' type of feel," Nelson relates.

Additionally, a property analysis technician helps individual property owners establish effective integrated

▶ HOW WE DID IT

- Team approach to client management with clear, convenient flow of information from clients to crews
- Horticulture experts act as primary point of contact
- Develop one-, three- and five-year landscape plans to continually offer change
- Formally recognize long-term clients
- Develop relationships with individual property owners with HOAs and condo communities
- Focus on training and best management practices to drive out waste and improve quality

pest management (IPM) programs for their specific properties. The property analysis tech then works with the client services manager to ensure that the programs are implemented.

These tactics have proved to go a long way in deepening relationships and bolstering client loyalty. “When you have relationships with the individual homeowners, you simply have more voices on your side,” Nelson points out.

Nelson’s background in education goes a long way in strengthening relationships with the core constituency of property managers and HOA board members. She teaches various state-certified classes, such as “Right Plant, Right Place,” to help clients earn CEUs (continuing education units) and maintain their professional licensing.

Keeping the machine well-oiled

Greenscapes emphasizes continuing education and training internally, as well. For example, weekly training sessions are conducted with all teams. Some last five minutes while others take much longer. “At the end of each year, we prepare our training templates for the coming year,” Pruchansky says. “We have found that the more we train, the better the end result. Repetition in training works.”

Nelson has recently started a book club for all senior managers. “We read two self-help or management books a year,” she tells. “We have breakfast together to discuss each book, talking about what we’ve learned and how it has affected us as both a team and as individuals. It is our conviction that the better the individuals, the better the team.”

Greenscapes requires all managers to become Florida Certified Horticulture Professionals. Additionally, all supervisors and crew leaders must main-

tain BMP Certification in order to continue working at the company. BMP (best management practices) for Florida’s Green Industries is offered through the University of Florida’s extension office. It’s a science-based program that identifies landscape management recommendations.

“We’re a company that utilizes best management practices each and every day,” Nelson says. For instance, fertilizer blends are based on soil samples, and irrigation sensors help deliver just the right amount of water. “We have truly embraced technology for the betterment of our clients’ properties,” Nelson says.

Greenscapes has also developed its own best management practices to improve efficiency and reduce waste. For instance, the company has switched from five 8-hour days to four 10-hour days. Nelson says this move, which wasn’t met with nearly the employee resistance she’d envisioned, has helped save a considerable amount of money in the way of unbillable downtime.

Several other internal systems have been tweaked. For instance, all managers have company-issued smartphones, helping improve response times while reducing costly backtracking to properties. Conversion to a near paperless office is also underway. Email and scanners improve communication and reduce paper cost, and direct deposit is utilized for most employees’ paychecks.

Greenscapes has also gotten a little more aggressive when it comes to new sales. “Our sales have grown over the past 20 years through referrals,” Pruchansky points out. “Two years ago, though, we decided to add salesmen to our mix to further promote and market our company.”

Even for companies the size of Greenscapes, it’s important to continue generating new leads. Still, the focus is

PRUNING AIN'T NO JOKE

When it comes to pruning, the Greenscapes philosophy can be summed up by an age-old saying: Haste makes waste.

Pruning teams are trained on how to prune for the health and appearance of the plant. They are instructed to prune plants to their natural shape—as opposed to just pruning plants for the sake of pruning them.



To help reduce labor hours, three-man pruning crews have been reduced to two. Efficiency hasn’t suffered, though. That third guy, who previously focused on clean-up, has been replaced by something that works for free—a couple of garbage cans.

Growth regulators are used where applicable in order to reduce excess trimming. Then, all debris is hauled back to the Greenscapes facility where it is piled toward the back of the yard. Through its membership in the Sunshine State Biomass Cooperative, a recycling truck comes to pick the debris up, free of charge, to haul it away. That horticultural debris is later turned into fuel.

So, when it comes to pruning, haste makes waste in more ways than one.

on quality over quantity—and making every client feel like they are the only client. As their brochure states: They are large enough to handle the biggest project, but small enough to respond to every need. That’s the recipe Linda Nelson and Steve Pruchansky have been cooking up for 20 years. ◀

Check out the video on Greenscapes of Southwest Florida by visiting greenindustrypros.com/10727288.

Some kids have their futures handed to them. I had to push.

With college only a few years away, I was looking for ways to earn a little extra cash. So my dad, wise man that he is, gave me the best gift he could – an old, beat-up push mower – and sent me on my way. I made enough that spring and summer to buy a better mower the following year. And that mower earned me my first Grasshopper. By the time college enrollment came around, I was looking at trucks and trailers, had two buddies working alongside me and was building a reputation for the best cut in town. Sure, it took me a bit longer to get that business degree – but it also ensured I never had to worry about tuition and books, and took the financial pressure off Mom and Dad. Now I've got both a successful business and a degree. And while I had to push a bit to get started, thanks to my Grasshoppers, the future looks like a pretty smooth ride.





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Lawn Renovation Rejuvenation

Tighter budgets encouraged both homeowners and commercial property managers to skimp on services like aeration over the past few years. But many lawn renovation pros are seeing a comeback this year—and are feeling even better about their prospects going forward.

“When it comes to aeration, you don’t necessarily see the results, so it’s a tougher service to sell,” says Shane Bell of Indiana-based L.T. Rich, a manufacturer of aerators and sprayers. “Unfortunately, because a lot of people don’t understand how important it is to aerate, it’s often one of the first services to get cut.”

Fremont, CA, contractor Tom Del Conte of Del Conte’s Landscaping will attest to that. Del Conte saw a big drop in lawn renovation services in 2008. But now the business is starting to come back.

“We’re seeing the purse strings loosen again,” Del Conte relates. “So we’re really stressing what it will take to get that premium landscape curb

appeal back. About 20% of our commercial customers have added renovation services back this year, and we’re expecting another 20% or more to add them back next year.”

This year’s early spring has also helped spur a lawn renovation comeback. “The early spring had homeowners wanting to get their yards fixed up earlier,” says Jay Baudhuin, product manager for the Classen and Ryan brands of turf care and renovation equipment. “Last year, on the other hand, was quite cold and wet across much of the U.S.”

Scott Kinkead, executive vice president of

Turfco, another equipment manufacturer, agrees that the early spring has had an impact. “Contractors weren’t as pressed on their timeline to get things done. People needed services sooner.”

Bad weather also helps

As is often the case in the landscape maintenance business, adverse weather conditions can also lead to a surge in demand for certain services.

“Our renovation business has continued to remain strong, even over the past few years,” says Jeff Roth, fleet manager for Bluegrass Lawncare in Bridgeton, MO. “It’s all driven by the weather. When lawns get beat up all spring and summer, homeowners need to put them back together in the fall.”

“Where conditions are severe, meaning drought or flooding, the turf renovation business is typically strong,” Baudhuin adds. As of late-July, roughly 80% of the contiguous U.S. was experiencing drought conditions, compared to just 37% one year ago. Furthermore, roughly 46% was experiencing conditions classified as “severe.”

Lawn renovation, namely aerating, helps make turf more tolerable to heat and prolonged drought. Additionally, Baudhuin points out, it can help property owners conserve water, since properly aerated lawns help water get down to the root zone better. This can be an important selling point in areas where watering restrictions exist.

On the flip side, excessive rain can damage turf and cause soil to compact. “In these regions, contractors should make customers aware of how compacted soil increases water runoff and risk of flooding,” Baudhuin says. Although few areas of the country have been faced with excessive

Four main drivers are leading aeration and other lawn renovation services to become a more requested and profitable component to an overall landscape maintenance plan.

rainfall so far this year, Baudhuin cautions that things can change in a blink. “The weather since last fall has been a little chaotic in most areas.”

Overall lawn health an education in progress

In any event, it needs to be communicated to customers that lawn renovation services play an intricate role in the overall management and health of a lawn. According to Pierre Pereira, vice president of sales and marketing at equipment maker Billy Goat Industries, contractors are doing a much better job of educating customers about the benefits.

“An aerated, overseeded and power-raked lawn results in a more drought-resistant, attractive and healthy lawn,” Pereira says. “This drives demand from additional customers who see these results at their neighbors.”

Since the recession, some homeowners have cancelled their basic lawn mowing and/or fertilizing services to begin doing the work themselves. However, lawn care tasks like aerating are typically immune from this trend—which is good news for contractors.

“Lawn renovation is usually something homeowners are not familiar with,” Kinkead says. “Plus, it’s a hassle for them. It requires them to rent and transport equipment. So it’s a valuable, profitable service that a contractor can provide.”

More productive, more profitable

Advancements in product design have made it even more profitable. “Contractors are asking how they can expand their businesses without having to add people,” Kinkead says. “They can do that by adding better equipment. They need sturdy, durable equipment.”

“Product innovation is improving to help contractors get the job done faster

with less fatigue,” Pereira adds, while offering the following examples:

- More ergonomic designs
- Hydrostatic drives in aerators, dethatchers and overseeders
- Elimination of the conventional yet cumbersome filling of the center drum, as well as bulky steel weights found on some units
- Fold-down handles for easier transport
- Tilt-up serviceability
- Easy tine disengagement
- Attachments for zero-turn mowers

Contractor Tom Del Conte has taken a real liking to his mower-mounted Grasshopper Aera-vator. “It’s very productive for wide-open areas,” he says. “Then we

use our Ryan walk-behinds for the nooks and crannies. You can’t neglect those areas, although some contractors think it’s OK to.”

Contractor Jeff Roth is also a fan of the Ryan brand. As of late, though, he’s developed a fondness for the L.T. Rich ride-on aerator. “This is the first year we’ve used it—and we’ve been thoroughly impressed,” he shares. “It’s a workhorse, and is very versatile. What’s nice is that you can also mount a spreader to it. That lets me schedule one guy to do the work of a two-man crew.”

The future of lawn renovation

Like the equipment used to provide the services, the lawn renovation business itself has come a long way. Now the question is: Where is it going?

“We are anticipating continued modest growth as homeowners continue to become more educated on the benefits of aeration, dethatching and overseeding,” Baudhuin says. “Contractors

should stress the importance of these services in both the spring and fall because nobody can predict what the summer will ultimately bring.”

“As erratic weather patterns become more of a challenge, the need for renovation will remain on the rise,” Pereira reminds. “Lawn care pros are not only pressed to provide lawn renovation services, but are embracing the opportunity to boost their bottom lines.”

Speaking of lawn care, emerging trends in that business are also creating more opportunity for contractors to cash in on renovation services. “For contractors looking at newer grass varieties and/or shifting to more organic-based lawn care programs, aeration

is a huge part of maintaining a successful program,” Kinkead points out.

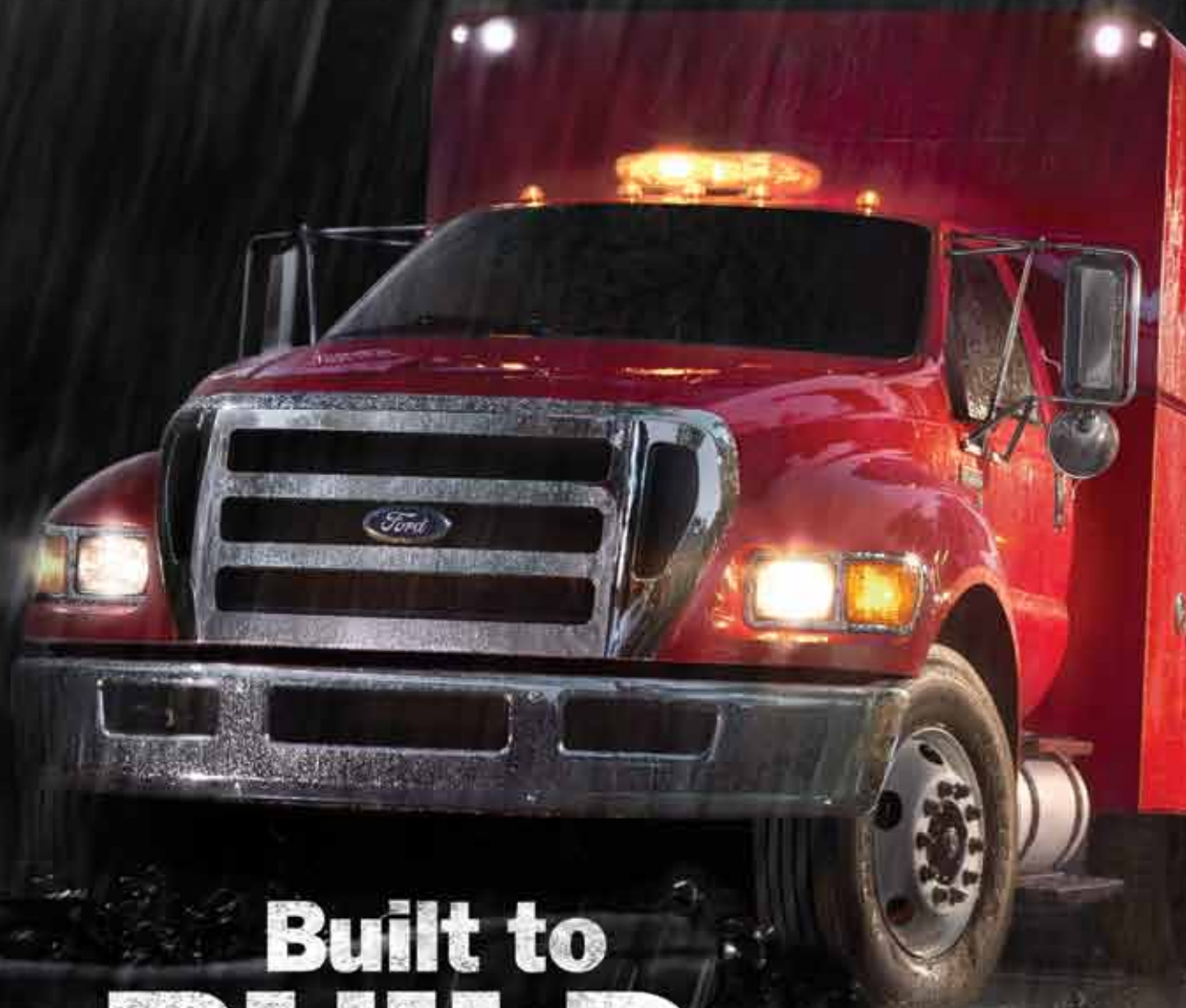
Finally, things like aeration are no longer viewed as just off-season side services. “Turf

renovation services are often coupled together to combat a specific problem or to enhance the end result of an application,” Baudhuin explains. “In the North, fall has been the traditional time of year to dethatch and aerate. In the South, spring has been favored.

“However, overseeding coupled with aeration has proven to be a successful recipe for enhancing seed germination to thicken turf. Since overseeding is in high demand throughout the entire grass-growing season, the demand for aeration services is up—and the traditional season of application has been expanded.” ◀

Lawn care pros are not only pressed to provide lawn renovation services, but are embracing the opportunity to boost their bottom lines.

Check out page 16 for tips on growing a lawn renovation business.



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How To **GROW** Your Lawn Renovation **BUSINESS**

The lawn renovation business is poised to rebound for the next several years. If you're one of the roughly 42,000 contractors looking to grow this line of business—or one of the thousands looking to break into it—here are some things you'll want to know as you establish your plan of attack.

It's a diverse, competitive market

Over the past five years, contractors have entered the lawn renovation business in droves. But according to Scott Kinkead, executive vice president of equipment maker Turfco, there is plenty of room for more.

"It's always about being competitive," Kinkead says. "For contractors already in this business, it's going to be about keeping existing customers

and expanding services, whether it's aerating, seeding or using a sod cutter.

"There's also room for more contractors," Kinkead continues. "It's all about how they are selling their services. Like anything, they need to promote the benefits and value of lawn renovation. Just going out there and telling people they offer the service doesn't mean they'll grow their business. They need to be an educator and explain the value of a turf maintenance program—which leads to long-term relationships."

Getting started

For contractors just starting out in lawn renovation, Pierre Pereira says it's a good idea to work with a local equipment dealer to not only get equipped, but to become educated.

Dealers can often help you get your hands on educational materials for

marketing pieces. "Start marketing as soon as possible," Pereira advises. "Differentiate your offering. Get in front of the season so you can glean target audience mind space." Pereira is vice president of sales and marketing at equipment manufacturer Billy Goat Industries.

"Start out small and make customer service your top priority," offers Jay Baudhuin, product manager for the Classen and Ryan brands. "Remember, it will take some time to build your customer base—so be patient. Outline a marketing plan; Yellow Pages, door hangers and yard signs are some options."

Identifying who your customers are is another critical first step. "Are you after commercial, residential, or a combination?" asks Kinkead.

If you're thinking about becoming

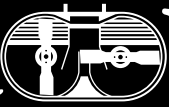
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a lawn renovation specialist, get to know the contractors in your area that do not offer these services. Then, get a good business model in place. “Provide quality and productivity so it appears as seamless as possible for the end customer,” Kinkead explains. “Also, figure out how it’s going to be profitable for both you and the primary contractor—and find out expectations and timeline.”

Building your business

In the residential maintenance arena, which contractor gets the business often comes down to who markets and sells the best, according to contractor Jeff Roth, fleet manager for Bluegrass Lawncare in Bridgeton, MO.

“We market lawn renovation all year round, generally building it into our

overall seven-step lawn care program,” Roth says. “We also do a rigorous marketing effort directed toward our existing customer base that starts in the middle of the summer. Then, in August, we ramp up and do another campaign to add new customers just for fall aeration and seeding.”

In the commercial maintenance business, it’s a good idea to make lawn renovation a component of an overall maintenance package. However, you may want to consider keeping it out of the contract. Why? Because putting lawn renovation services in your bid could result in your over-bidding.

“We keep lawn renovation services separate so they’re treated as add-ons,” says Tom Del Conte of Del Conte’s Landscaping in Fremont, CA. “That way we can control it better. The



customer sees what we’re doing, and nothing is taken for granted.

“That’s not to say that we aren’t talking about lawn renovation early in the sales process, because doing so is very important,” Del Conte adds.

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“Selling a la carte, though, positions us as the expert.”

Since services like dethatching and aerating are harder for the consumer to understand, Del Conte has found that incorporating visual aids in the sales process is effective. Photos showing aeration cores or the amount of thatch that’s typically raked from a lawn can make an impact. So do graphics or illustrations explaining the positive effects of these services on overall turf health. “You should be able to get some of these items from your dealer,” Del Conte reminds.

Look at additional markets you could penetrate. For instance, if you’re in the commercial maintenance business, could you target segments of the residential market?

“Municipalities, golf courses and

sports complexes are other potential customers,” Baudhuin points out.

“With budget cuts, municipalities are looking to outsource certain functions to the private sector.” The same goes for golf courses and sports complexes. If any of these niche markets present real opportunity, you’ll need to think about buying larger equipment, such as mower- or tractor-mounted implements. Renting is also an option if you have just a handful of larger jobs.

Finally, look at additional services you could incorporate into your lawn renovation offering. Dethatching, aeration and overseeding are the most

common. But contractors located in the mid-section of the country, such as Del Conte, have found additional revenue in the way of verticutting and re-seeding.

“I’m located in the Bay Area of California, and we have these large patches where warm-season grasses

such as Bermuda and St. Augustine have invaded and dominated, because they are very aggressive in nature,” Del Conte explains. “Many property owners do not want this because these grasses go dormant and brown in the winter. We’ve created a nice business of verticutting and overseeding with cool-season grasses in the fall.” ◀

“With budget cuts, municipalities are looking to outsource certain functions to the private sector.”

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➔ For more equipment and product information, visit the Product Guide at GreenIndustryPros.com

Just Tell Me It Works

Intense brand loyalties are out the window as lawn care contractors simply want to cost-effectively and reliably control weeds.

When it comes to managing weeds, lawn care contractors simply want a product

that works. Few are intensely loyal to a given brand of herbicide, and most haven't even had any experience with the majority

of the brands out there. According to a Brand Favorability survey completed by *Green Industry PRO*

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CONTRACTORS RANK HERBICIDE BRANDS

Brand	% with Favorable Opinion	% with No Opinion
Bayer	46%	51%
DuPont	39%	57%
Monsanto	39%	55%
PBI/Gordon	35%	62%
Dow	33%	64%
Syngenta	27%	70%
BASF	26%	70%
FMC	17%	79%
Nufarm	14%	83%
Quali-Pro	12%	85%
Valent	12%	85%
Fiesta (Engage Agro USA)	8%	89%
Arysta Life Science	4%	94%

EDITOR'S NOTE: Favorable opinion represents contractors who answered either "like them" or "they are the best" on the survey. Other options were "don't like them" and "no opinion".

magazine subscribers, only 2% of contractors (on average) don't like a given brand of herbicide. At the same time, just 3% identify a specific brand as being the best.

The overwhelming majority of contractors fall somewhere in the middle. The percentage that has no opinion of a given brand ranges from 51-94%, depending on the brand (see listings above). The percentage that has a favorable opinion of a given brand ranges from 4-46%.

For example, the most popular brand out there, Bayer, received just a 46% favorability rating. At the same time, 51% said they had no opinion of the Bayer brand, while 3% said they did not like the Bayer brand.

Check out the sidebar above to see how each of the more well-known brands of lawn care herbicides performed on the survey. Then, be sure to read about some of the specific products on the market today, which begin on page 22.



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Frostbite Weed Control System from Arctic Inc.

The patent-pending Frostbite Weed Control System kills weeds the way nature does: with frost. According to the manufacturer, Frostbite is a fast, effective, organic solution to control common weeds like crabgrass, goosegrass, chickweed, henbit and more with just a single application. Frostbite can prove to be an answer for today's growing demand for greener lawn care alternatives that can selectively kill weeds without the use of conventional herbicides. The manufacturer, Arctic

Inc., says its Frostbite System is cost-competitive with other post-emergent weed control products while providing several performance advantages, including:

- Naturally eliminates a wide range of weeds without harming cool-season grasses
- Fast, visible results with one application
- Instantly rain-safe with no risk of soil/aquifer contamination
- Effective at any outdoor temperature, even below 50° F and above 85° F
- No odor, no harmful residues and no re-entry delay

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Syngenta Tenacity Herbicide

Syngenta's Tenacity herbicide has received registration from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for use on residential lawns. However, as of June 2012, it is not yet registered for use in all states, so lawn care operators should check with their state or local extension service prior to buying or using this product.

- Selective pre- and post-emergence herbicide controls 46 broadleaf weeds and undesired grasses in most cool-season turf types
- In addition to weed control in established turf, Tenacity can be applied at seeding to reduce weed competition for improved seedling development
- Packaged in 8-ounce bottles, making it cost-effective and convenient to use
- Granted Reduced Risk status by the EPA due to its active ingredient, mesotrione, which has favorable ecotoxicity and human health profiles, compared to many registered herbicides

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FMC Solitare Herbicide

FMC says its Solitare herbicide is a great solution for post-emergence control of sedges, crabgrass and broadleaf weeds. The product provides high-level control when all three weed types are present.

- Patent-pending, optimized combination of sulfentrazone and quinclorac that combats post-emergence weeds from the foliage down and the root up
- This optimized formulation of dual active ingredients may eliminate the need to mix multiple products together
- Controls more than 60 grassy and broadleaf weeds on most warm- and cool-season turf types
- Stops the formation of vegetative reproduction structures, reducing the capability of reproduction for the remainder of the season and into the following season

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Quali-Pro Prodiamine Herbicide

Flexible application of the Prodiamine 65 WDG pre-emergent herbicide allows for both spring and fall use providing season-long crabgrass control.

- Non-staining
- Effectively controls annual bluegrass
- Low solubility and volatility
- Excellent tank mix partner with fertilizers and iron solutions
- Active ingredient rate as low as 1/4 the rate of other pre-emergent herbicides, according to the company
- Provides pre-emergent control of Crabgrass and 31 other problem weeds

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Fiesta Turf Weed Killer

Fiesta Turf Weed Killer is an effective herbicide labeled for broadleaf weed, moss and algae control.

- Approved by the EPA's BioPesticide Division
- Uses a proprietary iron chelate solution that works quickly with results seen within 24-48 hours
- Effective in cool temperatures
- No unpleasant odor
- People and pets can re-enter the treated site once dried
- Rain-fast within three hours of application
- Requires no special handling
- Kills weeds down to the root

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➤ continued on page 23

Solu-Cal with Cavalcade .37%

Cavalcade .37% pre-emergence herbicide contains the active ingredient prodiamine, the most robust of the dinitroaniline (DNA) herbicides.

- Provides pre-emergence control of 30 grassy and broadleaf weeds including crabgrass, *Poa annua*, goosegrass, prostrate spurge, common purslane and knotweed
- Supplies Solu-Cal calcium to soil and plants
- For both cool- and warm-season turfgrass, as well as ornamentals
- Labeled for use on all types of turfgrass including residential and commercial lawns, sports fields, golf courses (except putting greens), and sod farms
- Can be applied in fall for weed prevention next spring

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Dow's Snapshot Specialty Herbicide

Snapshot specialty herbicide offers control of more than 125 species of broadleaf and grassy weeds while minimizing the need for hand-weeding landscape beds.



- Labeled for use on more than 636 landscape ornamentals, reportedly more than any other granular pre-emergence herbicide
- Enhanced tolerance on established plants
- Long-lasting, broad-spectrum weed control
- Can be applied in early spring prior to germination of target weeds, in late summer to early fall, or immediately after cultivation
- Provides up to eight months of control
- Convenient granular formulation bonds tightly with soil particles and has a low water solubility, so it won't move out of the application zone

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Bayer's Tribute Total

Tribute Total provides a complete solution for post-emergent treatment in bermudagrass. The unique combination of active ingredients in Tribute Total replaces the need for tank mixing multiple products to achieve desired weed control.



- Effective against a broad spectrum of grassy and broadleaf weeds, sedges and kyllingas
- Controls problem weeds such as dallisgrass and crabgrass, as well as yellow and purple nutsedge
- At a use rate range of 1 to 3.2 ounces per acre, each 6-ounce container treats 1.875 to 6 acres
- Additionally, with a 60.5% water-dispersible granule formulation, it requires less storage space and transportation, and less-frequent container disposal

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Top Residential Hardscaping Trends

The experts at Belgard Hardscapes talk about six key product trends, and the importance of a consistent sales and marketing process in this growingly competitive business.

While the landscape installation business as a whole has been stung by the construction and housing slowdown, homeowners have developed an even deeper love for their outdoor living spaces. Thus, that business has remained strong. And as an integral component to an outdoor living space, the hardscaping business has remained relatively strong as well.

“Outdoor living spaces continue to be popular because homeowners are staying in their homes longer,” says Ken O’Neill, vice president of marketing for Belgard Hardscapes. “Remodeling has allowed consumers to create the perfect home for

their families without relocating. A big part of those renovations are to their outdoor spaces—both in the front of their homes for curb appeal as well as their backyard living spaces for enjoyment and entertainment.”

What today’s homeowners want

In general, consumers want a variety of choices in styles for their hardscapes, and they want those styles to complement the design of their homes. There are basically four styles that today’s homeowners are looking for.



Photo courtesy of Landscape America in Wrentham, MA.

Classic – This type of product’s smooth textures are made to look like brick or cobble stone, and also match the look of tile. This remains the dominant product in the market, according to O’Neill.

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Antique – In the 1990s, Belgard started tumbling the product to distress the corners and edges, creating a time-worn, yet elegant look. O'Neill says this is the second most popular type of product.

Natural – Recently, Belgard's R&D team scans natural stone, and applies those photos (textures) to their molds to make the final product look more natural. "The goal has always been to make these products look like natural stone," O'Neill says. "We are getting closer and closer to the real thing." This type of product is gaining in popularity throughout the country, but is especially predominant in the Northeast and Midwest.

Contemporary – Though not a huge deal in the U.S. yet, more contemporary looks have really caught on in Europe. This trend is expected to gain in popularity here before too long—especially in more urban markets, and places like Florida and California. "We're talking about really clean lines," O'Neill says. "It also goes back to the way it was in the '80s a little bit in terms of shape, and using techniques like bush hammering and polishing to create unique textures."

Oversized and inset designs becoming more common

O'Neill is also seeing a lot more interest in oversized pavers. There's a simple explanation as to why.

"In general, patio spaces are getting larger than the basic 20x20 approach we used to see," O'Neill points out. "Consumers want things like outdoor kitchens and fireplaces. That means more square footage. Oversized pavers work well in these instances. Once you get to a 500-plus square-foot patio, bigger stones simply look nicer because they are more to scale. The larger dimensions, such as 8x16 (inch) or 16x24, also look a lot more like natural stone."

A sixth trend O'Neill has witnessed is that inset designs are becoming very

popular. They are often requested in the flooring (to look like a rug), and also in the hardscapes of a fire element.

Regardless of what product or style the homeowner is looking for, one thing is universal: Homeowners want to know that what they're installing is going to last, so durability and warranties are important.

Staying competitive and growing sales

Follow-up with both potential and past customers is critical in today's market. "It's hard to do, especially for some of the smaller contractors during the busier seasons, but it has to be done," O'Neill says. "That's when you're building up jobs for the slower seasons."

Past customers can become great repeat customers. Ask them: How are you enjoying your hardscape? Is there anything I can do to add to your outdoor living space? Are you ready for the next phase?

"Many homeowners don't fully understand the potential of an outdoor living space until they've lived with it for a while," O'Neill points out. "They've been cooking on a regular grill, but now can see the benefit they'd get from an outdoor kitchen bar. Or they've enjoyed a moveable iron fire pit, but might like the enhanced look of a hardscape fire pit with a low wall that offers additional seating space. By simply asking a past customer what you can do to help them better utilize their space, you can start conversations that can lead to new business." ◀

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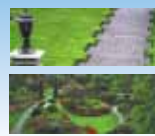
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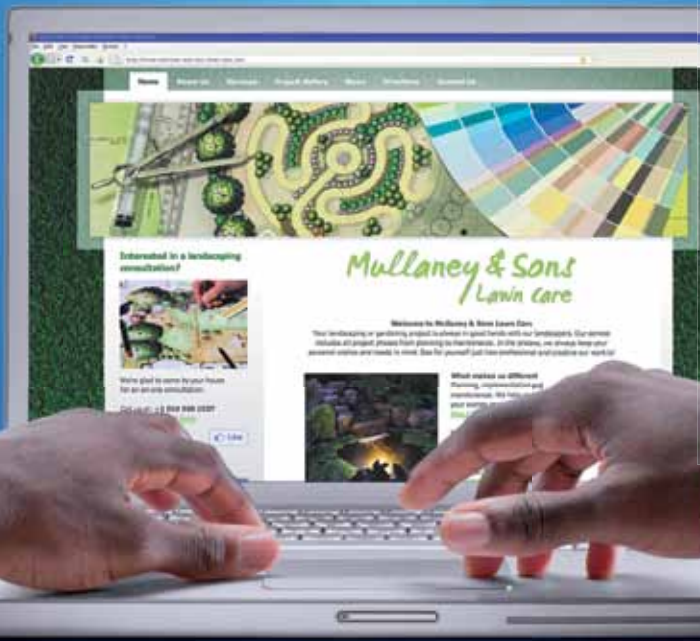


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