

CHOOSING A LAWN CARE COMPANY

There has been a tremendous increase in the number of home lawns handled by professional lawn care companies. Such expansion probably will continue in the future. Prospective customers should investigate the lawn care programs more extensively than is presently being done to avoid some of the problems which keep coming up.

In deciding whether or not to hire a professional lawn company, remember that few companies offer complete lawn care service including irrigation, mowing, trimming, aeration, and thatch control as well as fertilizing and pesticides. Also, due to the number of lawns taken care of by professional companies, they cannot always catch problems in the early stages nor apply chemicals and fertilizers under optimum conditions. Consequently, the homeowner must take some initiative in caring for the lawn and making sure the company is aware of problems before they get out of hand. If homeowners hire a professional lawn care company, they should check out several before selecting one. They also should understand what that company will and will not do. Here are some suggestions:

1. **Understand the fertility program.** How many pounds of nitrogen will they apply during the year and when? How about phosphorus and potassium? Unless soil tests indicate otherwise, the nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium (N-P₂O₅-K₂O) ratio should be around 4-1-2. High nitrogen with low phosphorus and potassium may make a dark green lawn but it doesn't make a very healthy lawn and problems will probably appear in several years.
2. **Understand the chemicals that will be used.** What will be used for broadleaf weed control? How about insect and disease control? Who will diagnose problems and how will they be verified? What will be used for grassy weed control? What will be done should the customer or neighbors object to the chemicals? What if shrubs or flowers should be damaged from herbicides, how will responsibility for damage be handled or proven?
3. **If you are looking at a company that uses "organic" methods, find out what they do about weed control.**
4. **Determine how flexible the program is.** Not all lawns require the same level of management. Is the company willing to change their standard program according to your specifications? Will the delay an application until more suitable weather if you request it?
5. **Find out who is in charge.** With whom will you communicate regarding problems? Who will assess problems? Who will apply the treatments? Who will check on quality control? What training have all these people had?
6. **Ask other customers about the company.** Do your friends and neighbors using that company feel it is responsive to their needs?
7. **Understand the guarantee.** Make sure you understand every provision in the written guarantee. Will they refund all your money or just the last application if you are not satisfied? What would they require as proof that they damaged your lawn or shrubs?
8. **Check the cost.** You can do it yourself more cheaply if you want to. You are paying for the convenience of having the lawn treated professionally, and for the expertise of the personnel responsible.
9. **Realize that you will still have to be highly involved in caring for your lawn if you want it to be healthy.**