

Choosing a Lawn Care Service



U.S. homeowners are turning to lawn, landscape, and tree care professionals in record numbers. The "Green Industry" services include lawn/landscape maintenance, landscape installation/construction, landscape design, and tree care. Homeowners benefit from the economic and environmental benefits of turf, and save time by hiring a lawn and landscape service.

In addition to fertilizing, a professional can tackle the more difficult aspects of lawn care, such as identifying and controlling lawn problems, using the proper equipment, and choosing the right product for your lawn. Hiring the right lawn care service takes a little effort, but the rewards of an environmentally safe, healthy lawn are substantial. The Professional Lawn Care Association of America offers these tips to help you select a professional lawn care service:

- ◆ **Determine what you want from a lawn service** - Lawn care companies provide a range of services including mowing, maintenance, aeration, seeding, landscaping, fertilizer, and pest control applications, and ornamental and small tree care.
- ◆ **Find out which companies provide service in your neighborhood** - Before looking in the yellow pages or answering an ad, ask your neighbors for a recommendation. It is a great way to determine the reputation of a company and the quality of service it provides.
- ◆ **Ask for a lawn inspection and a free estimate of service** - Companies that quote a price without seeing your lawn are only guessing what your lawn might need.
- ◆ **Ask about the price system and what services are included** - The lawn care company may offer a yearly contract or a simple verbal agreement, giving the customer the right to discontinue service at any time. Find out what happens if you have a problem between applications. Will the service calls be free or is there a charge? Get an explanation of what the service can do; find out what kind and amount of treatments will be applied, approximately when they will be applied, and what results can be expected.
- ◆ **Make sure the company is licensed and meets insurance and certification requirements**- The state of Kentucky and the Louisville Metro Area has licensing requirements for fertilizer and pesticide applicators. This means that the company has at least a minimal working knowledge of the fertilizers and pesticides they are applying to your yard. Customers should insist on proof of state-required licensing. Call the Kentucky Department of Agriculture (502-573-0282) to check the status of their license or certification. Ask about the amount of liability insurance that the company carries and appropriate worker's compensation coverage.
- ◆ **Safety factors** - Almost all lawn care products use must be registered with the Kentucky State Environmental and Public Protection Cabinet. Some states require posting a sign after a product is applied, recommending that you avoid contact with the turf until the product is dry. Whether posting is required or not, it is a good practice to follow.
- ◆ **Professional memberships** - Ask with what professional organizations the company is affiliated. Companies that belong to at least one professional organization usually strive for quality in workmanship.

How safe are the lawn care pesticides used by lawn care professionals and homeowners?

Homeowners should be aware that the use of pesticides does pose a risk, and their use can not be made completely safe. The level of risk posed by a chemical depends on its toxicity and the level of exposure. Improper or inappropriate use of pesticides and other lawn care products by either the homeowner or the lawn care professional can increase the level of exposure, which in turn increases the level of risk posed to human health and the environment.



What can I do to minimize any risks to me or my family?

The simplest way to minimize risk is to limit your exposure to pesticides. If your lawn care service is going to apply a fertilizer or pesticide treatment to your lawn, make sure you:

- ◆ Ask what type of pesticide will be applied, and how much;
- ◆ Ask that the company provide you with a record of the service, including the amount and type of pesticide, fertilizer, or chemical applied, and keep the record in a safe place;
- ◆ Ask the company to post signs saying the turf has been treated and leave them up for at least 24 hours or until the grass is dry;
- ◆ Do what you can to limit exposure to pets, children, birds and other wildlife; and
- ◆ If someone enters your home by walking on the lawn prior to the complete drying of the lawn, have a washable mat or towel at the door, where they can remove their shoes, minimizing indoor contact with carpeting and other flooring.

Do lawn care professionals use products that pose greater risk than those used by the homeowner?

The pesticides regularly used by lawn care professionals are usually the same as "general use" products available to the homeowner. Licensed lawn care professionals occasionally use "restricted use" products (materials that are not available to the general public) to solve pest problems that are not responsive to general use products. Be sure to ask whether any restricted-use pesticides will be included in your program.

Lawn care products are generally labeled with the same rates, the same precautions, and the same usage information whether packaged for personal or professional use. The products purchased by the lawn care professional may be packaged in concentrates for shipping convenience and economy. Before these products are applied to your lawn, they are diluted to the same strength as the ready-to-use products sold directly to the homeowner.

What is Integrated Pest Management (IPM)?

An IPM program is one designed to create a healthy lawn with sufficient plant strength and density to survive weed, insect, and disease attacks with minimum pesticide use. An IPM program considers your lawn's specific needs and overall condition. An IPM program makes use of several practices:

- ◆ Proper mowing practices
- ◆ Regular watering at a rate that maintains root moisture
- ◆ Core aeration
- ◆ Programmed seeding, sodding, plugging, or sprigging
- ◆ Fertilization
- ◆ pH balance treatments

Learn more about IPM practices for your lawn to reduce the use of pesticides!



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