

SUMMER 2026



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Inaugural Issue



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Georgia Urban Ag Council

2566 Shallowford Rd, Ste 104 - Box 117
Atlanta GA 30345
Phone: 706.750.0350 | Fax: 404.900.9194
Email: office@georgiauac.com
Web: urbanagcouncil.com

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INDUSTRY*Insights*

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Upcoming UAC & industry events

Dear UAC Members and Supporters,

AS WE LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE OF THE

Georgia Urban Ag Council, I am thrilled to introduce a significant milestone in our communication strategy: our new bi-annual magazine, **Industry Insights**. This publication is designed to be more than just a newsletter; it is a dedicated resource to provide you with news, legislative updates, deep dives into the trends currently shaping our professional industry, and more.

The future of UAC

The landscape of our industry is shifting rapidly, influenced by complex factors ranging from private equity involvement to critical workforce shortages. To navigate these challenges effectively, the UAC Board met in 2025 for a pivotal strategic planning retreat to redefine our trajectory. The result is a comprehensive roadmap that prioritizes advocacy, education, and career development. We envision a future where UAC stands as the definitive, unifying voice for Georgia's urban agriculture industry, empowering professionalism through leadership and innovation.

Join us and make a difference

However, this vision is not something the Board can achieve in isolation. To ensure every voice is heard and every initiative is focused, we utilize a structured advisory framework where the committees serve as the engine for innovation and strategy. It is with this spirit of collaboration that I invite you to step into a leadership role by joining one of our 2026 Standing Committees. This is a rewarding way to contribute your unique expertise and help drive the research and recommendations that will shape our industry's future.

Committees are charged with researching and making formal recommendations to the UAC Board, meeting 3-4 times annually via Zoom or in person. Our initial meetings for this cycle will begin in June 2026. We are currently seeking member participants for the following:

- > **Membership committee:** This group focuses on strengthening and growing our professional community. Objectives include reviewing and refining the UAC dues structure and addressing the specific impacts of industry business consolidations.

> **Education committee:**

As we strive to become the "go-to" resource for professional development, this committee leads the way in workforce development and industry knowledge. You will help evaluate current educational programs and identify new learning opportunities to keep our members competitive.

- > **Legislative committee:** This committee serves as our "Policy Champion," advocating for our industry at the Capitol. Directed by Bryan Tolar, the committee coordinates advocacy efforts to protect the interests of Georgia's urban agriculture professionals.



Why your participation matters

Our new mission is clear: the Georgia Urban Ag Council fuels the growth of our industry by strengthening professional standards, delivering high-quality education, and cultivating the next-generation workforce. By joining a committee, you ensure that our activities align directly with the skills the current and future workforce needs and that our legislative voice remains powerful and unified. Committees will be comprised of at least two Board members and up to five UAC members.

Get involved today

Take this opportunity to give back to your professional community and help UAC grow. If you are interested in becoming more involved, please email us at office@georgiauac.com with your preferred committee and a brief note regarding your area of interest.

We invite you to join us in this journey as we work together to grow a stronger, more resilient urban ag industry in Georgia. If you have any questions about these roles or the new magazine, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Warm regards,

Mary Kay Woodworth | Executive Director

Growing together

Your voice, your future, your UAC

By Mary Kay Woodworth, Georgia Urban Ag Council



The Georgia UAC Board of Directors: Jay Griffin, Jim McCutcheon, Pam Dooley, Jeff Walters, Jonathan Gillespie, Jennifer Jorge, Randy Moody, Mary Kay Woodworth, Ken Morrow, Clint Waltz. Not pictured: Mario Cambardella

THE LEADERSHIP OF THE GEORGIA Urban Ag Council (UAC) gathered in June 2025 for a pivotal strategic planning retreat to redefine the organization's trajectory. This wasn't merely a routine board meeting; it was a dedicated mission to capture a vision of a thriving, successful organization for the future - one that centers entirely on you, our members.

Looking toward 2026 and beyond, this new strategic roadmap solidifies the UAC into the definitive, unifying voice for Georgia's urban ag industry.

The landscape of our industry is shifting, influenced by everything from private equity to workforce shortages. To navigate these challenges, the Board developed a comprehensive framework that prioritizes advocacy, education, and career/workforce development.

Here is a detailed look at what this strategic plan means for your business, your professional growth, and our collective community.

A powerful voice: Your policy champion

In the legislative and regulatory arenas, the UAC is committed to being the "Policy Champion" that promotes and protects our industry. We recognize that policy decisions made under the Gold Dome or in D.C. have immediate impacts on your operational costs and daily business practices.

- > **ROBUST ADVOCACY:** We are establishing a comprehensive coalition of organizations to ensure a unified front in legislative discussions.
- > **MEMBER ENGAGEMENT:** We will recruit a dedicated "member advocacy team" - a group of "call-on" professionals who can expertly represent the industry to key decision-makers.
- > **TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION:** To keep you informed, we continue our weekly Capital Connection report during Georgia's legislative session, and will bring timely legislative updates via the monthly *UAC Digital Magazine* and twice annually through *UAC Industry Insights*, providing you with consistent policy news.
- > **PAC STRENGTH:** We are refining our fundraising processes for the Georgia GrowPAC, recognizing that strong financial support opens doors and helps establish long-standing relationships with regulators.

Excellence through education

The UAC vision for the next three years is to become the "go-to" resource for professional development. Our goal is to foster a culture of diverse, continuous learning that empowers you to stay competitive in an increasingly complex market.

- > **TARGETED LEARNING:** We are crafting a learning strategy that focuses on offering content specific to our industry's current trends and best practices.

- > **CERTIFICATION SUPPORT:** We will continue to support and promote essential certifications, including the Georgia Certified Landscape Professional (GCLP) and Georgia Certified Plant Professional (GCPP), as well as CEUs for agronomics, arboriculture, agronomics and others.
- > **STATE-WIDE ACCESSIBILITY:** We are increasing the frequency of educational sessions across the state to ensure that every member, regardless of location, has access to high-quality growth opportunities.
- > **MEMBER-DRIVEN CONTENT:** By utilizing regular member surveys, we will ensure that our curriculum aligns directly with the skills you need for career advancement.

Building the workforce of tomorrow

The workforce gap is a primary concern for every professional in our field. UAC is stepping into a leadership role to build a "career-ready" workforce that is prepared to drive economic impact.

- > **INDUSTRY ALIGNMENT:** We are working with educators and training providers to create curriculum and career pathways that align with actual industry needs.
- > **STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS:** UAC is dedicated to nurturing partnerships and connecting our membership with resources for both new talent and the upskilling of existing staff.
- > **TALENT PIPELINE:** Our future vision includes seamless connections with colleges and vocational schools, facilitating internships and collegiate events to ensure the urban ag industry is viewed as an attractive, high-paying career path.

An inclusive and vibrant community

UAC is more than just a resource; it is a community of peers. Our three-year vision emphasizes an organization that is inviting and welcoming to all industry professionals, regardless of their background or tenure.

- > **INTENTIONAL OUTREACH:** We are actively working to connect with younger generations, women, and underrepresented groups to ensure our leadership is as diverse as the industry we serve.
- > **ENGAGING NETWORKS:** We are expanding our networking opportunities to be designed to foster genuine relationships.
- > **ENHANCED VALUE:** Our objective is to ensure that the value of membership is so clear that the question "what does the UAC do for me?" becomes unnecessary.

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Our new vision and mission

To anchor these efforts, the leadership has drafted a unified mission:

The Georgia Urban Ag Council fuels the growth of the landscape, turfgrass, and horticulture industry (urban agriculture) by strengthening professional standards, delivering high-quality education, providing impactful advocacy, and cultivating the next-generation workforce.

We envision a future where UAC is the unifying voice of Georgia's landscape, turfgrass, and horticulture industry (urban agriculture), empowering professionalism through leadership, advocacy and education.

Join us!

We invite you to join us in this journey as we work together to grow a stronger, more sustainable urban ag industry in Georgia.



Mary Kay Woodworth
Executive Director
Georgia Urban Ag Council



UNIVERSITY OF
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Turfgrass Research Field Day



Industry Partners Exhibitor & Sponsorship Opportunities



August 5, 2026

University of Georgia Griffin Campus
1109 Experiment St. Griffin, GA 30223

**Industry social and dinner August 4, 2026*

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Gold Sponsor \$1,000	Platinum Sponsor \$2,500	
• Company logo on Field Day Booklet and Sponsor Banner • Company name announced during Welcome Ceremony • 1 complimentary field day attendee registration	• Premier Sponsor recognition • Large sponsorship logo flag at event entrance • Company logo on Field Day Booklet and Sponsor Banner • Company name announced during Welcome Ceremony • 2 complimentary field day attendee registrations • 10 x 10' exhibitor booth	



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AWARDS

GALA Awards Ceremony & Banquet
Piedmont Park | Atlanta | March 23

THE 2026 GEORGIA LANDSCAPE AWARDS attracted entries from repeat winners and newcomers alike, celebrating excellence in landscape design and build as well as landscape maintenance.

Twenty-three award entries drew a crowd of over 120 UAC members and guests to the banquet. Together, industry leaders celebrated eight bronze, six silver, and seven gold awards. Supplier of the Year and MVP were also recognized, showcasing those who go the extra mile for their company. 

DESIGN / BUILD / INSTALLATION



Arcoiris Design Gardening | Mary's Garden | Gold



Atlanta Fine Gardens | Modern Residence | Gold



Arcoiris Design Gardens | W. Paces Ferry | Gold



Atlanta Fine Gardens | Modern Courtyard | Gold





Blue Fossil Group | Eppsteiner | Gold



Beautyberry Gardens | Satterwhite | Silver

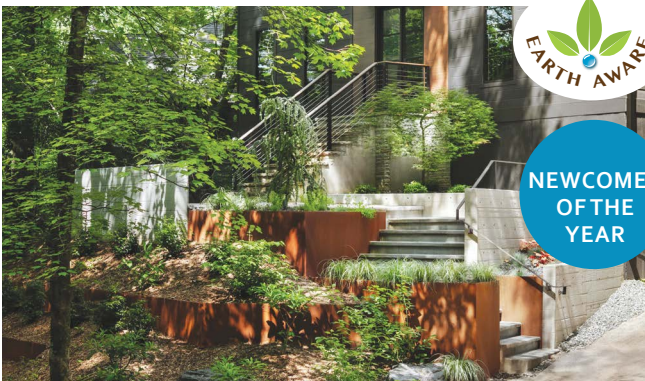


JUDGES' CHOICE

Golden Sea Outdoors | Marsh View | Gold



Designed Landscape by HP Dutra | Weigelia | Silver



EARTH AWARE

NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR

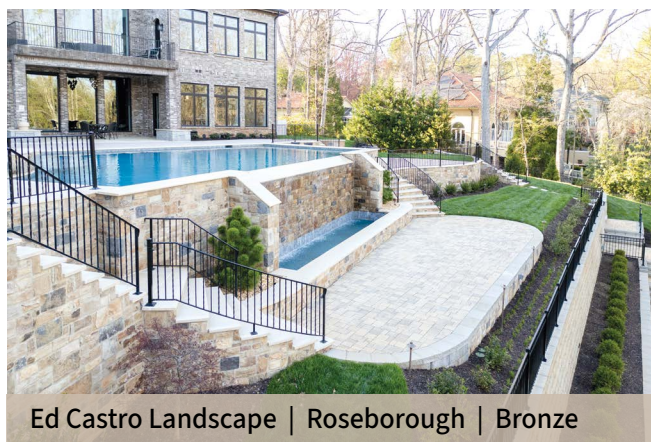
Atlanta Fine Gardens | Sophisticated Entryway | Silver



Garden Atlantic | AHMA | Silver



DESIGN / BUILD / INSTALLATION



MVP AWARD

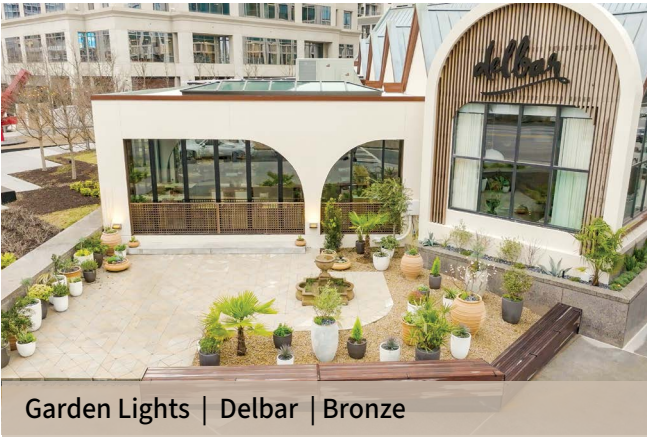
Tom Baumann | Operations Manager | *Nominated by Atlanta Fine Gardens*



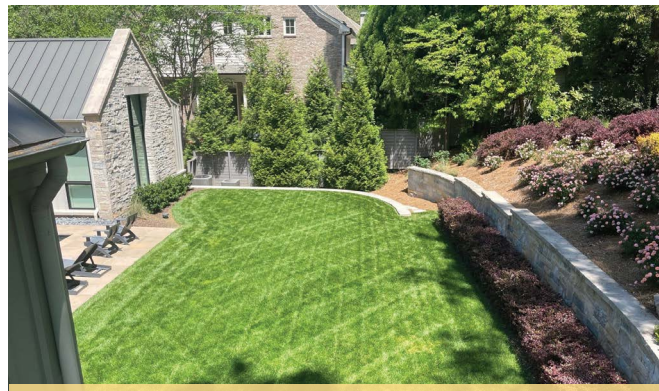
As a bilingual leader, Tom is a vital bridge between management and our Hispanic crew members, ensuring every employee feels valued, heard, and included in the company's culture. He frequently assists employees with life-changing personal tasks, such as setting up bank accounts or obtaining driver's licenses.

His ability to handle difficult conversations with directness and professionalism has made him a critical asset in hiring and developing a high-level team.

Tom was instrumental in implementing superior accounting and organizational systems that have transformed the company's financial tracking. Under his guidance, Atlanta Fine Gardens has elevated its professional standards and successfully transitioned toward more sustainable industry practices.



Garden Lights | Delbar | Bronze



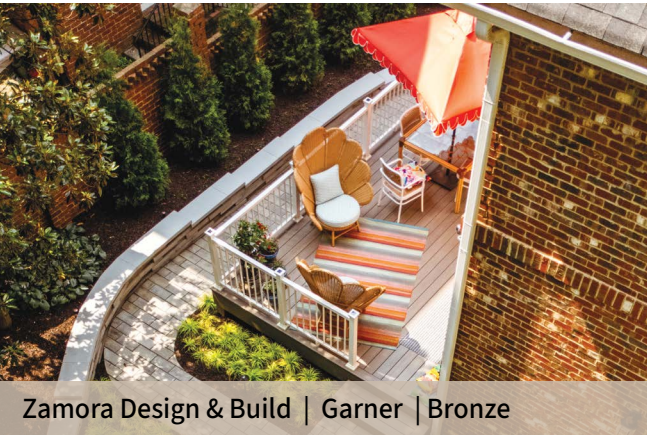
Ed Castro Landscape | Kieffer Residence | Gold



Zamora Design & Build | Ensman | Bronze



Ed Castro Landscape | White Residence | Bronze



Zamora Design & Build | Garner | Bronze



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- > Company details
- > Judges' comments

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urbanagcouncil.com/2026-gala-winners

SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR

Outdoor Living Supply | *Nominated by ServeScape*



The Outdoor Living Supply team is able to answer any question from availability, durability, and anything remotely related to their product line. Their response times are quicker and more accurate than any other vendor we work with.

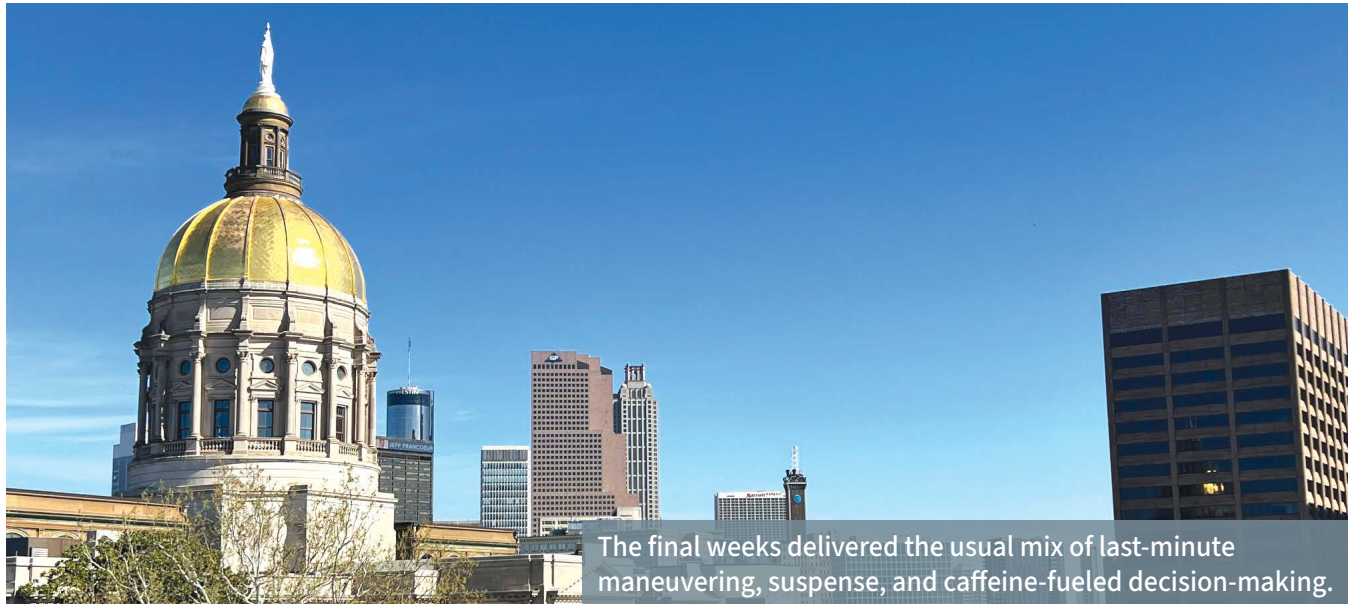
They often will check in, unprompted, for upcoming projects and opportunities, and also let us know proactively when their supply chain may be impacted, which is of paramount importance for the success of scheduling our projects. They are able to provide any requested documentation for their products and our collaborative projects.

We've been able to expand our services and increase our project portfolio 10-fold thanks to Outdoor Living Supply!

Big ideas, bold ambitions and a little chaos

Policy issues address affordability in 2026

By Bryan Tolar, Tolar Capitol Partners



POLICY ENGAGEMENT AND advocacy are critical to the success of our industry, and the Georgia Urban Agriculture Council is committed to carrying that responsibility forward. We are grateful every day for your investment as a member. Your support keeps our industry strong, engaged, and growing - and ensures our voice is heard where it matters most.

Georgia's future is full of economic opportunity, and UAC is proud to represent your interests under the Gold Dome. We're thankful to have you as part of this organization and are pleased to bring you a recap of the 2026 legislative session.

This year at the State Capitol featured no shortage of big ideas, bold ambitions, and - especially toward the end - a little chaos for good measure. The final weeks delivered the usual mix of last-minute maneuvering, suspense, and caffeine-fueled decision-making. But after 12 weeks of policy debate (and a fair amount of "sausage-making"), there's a lot to like in the final product.

The session began January 12 and wrapped up on April 2 (Sine Die), signaling lawmakers were officially out of time - and, in some cases, patience. Governor Kemp has 40 days to sign or veto the legislation that made it across the finish line.

Policies that passed

- > **RATE REDUCTIONS FOR STATE INCOME TAXES:** Governor Kemp has been methodical in his approach that reduced the state income tax rate from 5.19% to 4.99% this year. Beginning in 2027, lawmakers approved a plan to ratchet it down even further. The goal is to get the rate to 3.99% by 2034, if revenue targets are met to ensure the state remains fiscally sound. In short, if the economy continues to grow, then these additional cuts are likely to stick.

The income tax reduction bill also increases the standard deduction to \$18,000 for individuals and \$36,000 for couples, increases dependent deductions, and exempts the first \$1,750 in overtime and tip income from state income tax. Collectively, these allow Georgians to keep more of the money they earn.
- > **REFUND OF STATE INCOME TAXES:** Speaking of money, lawmakers approved another income tax refund of up to \$500 per family or \$250 per individual, totaling approximately \$1.17 billion returned to Georgia taxpayers in 2026. This marks the fourth tax rebate issued during Governor Kemp's impressive tenure. Most rebates are returned electronically, so keep an eye on your bank account for a splash of cash.

> **PROPERTY TAX RELIEF:** Lawmakers passed a bill that establishes a pathway to reduce homestead property taxes over time. Not a complete fix, but a strong start - and more work is likely ahead. The plan allows for a 1% Local Homestead Option Sales Tax (LHOST), if approved locally, to offset property taxes. This is expected to reduce the property taxes by about 50%. Yes, sales taxes may rise, but the tradeoff is a win for homeowners.

> **2027 STATE BUDGET:** The General Assembly passed the \$38.5 billion FY 2027 state budget that includes funding for several agriculture and education initiatives, including some University of Georgia research and agricultural breeding programs, Department of Agriculture initiatives, agricultural education programs, and technical college facility expansions.

UAC continues to advocate for proper staffing and funding for UGA research and Extension programs, which provide significant benefits to growers, the industry, and consumers across Georgia. More needs to be done to fund technician positions for the long-term success of ag research initiatives.

> **INSURANCE REFORMS:** The Georgia Insurance Affordability and Claims Integrity Act includes several insurance reforms such as increased fines and enforcement measures, storm claim mitigation provisions, guardrails on aerial imaging in underwriting, uninsured motorist enforcement, and updates to various insurance regulations. Insurance costs are hurting every business and consumer. We believe these changes, along with the work we supported last year on lawsuit reforms, will position Georgia to have a more competitive insurance market that will stabilize and lower these expenses.

> **WATER PLANNING:** As current drought conditions have agency heads and our industry concerned about water availability in the months ahead, lawmakers passed a bill that updates the structure for statewide water planning. Georgia's water planning process is made up of stakeholders serving on regional water planning councils. The policy passed this year tightens up those groups, making them less cumbersome, while still maintaining the overall structure of the state water management plan. This initiative is very important for how our state grows and plans for the future.



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Alex brings a hands-on approach to helping green businesses turn the complex parts of risk into clear, confident actions.

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- > **AG INDUSTRY STUDY COMMITTEE:** House Agriculture Committee Chairman Robert Dickey and Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Russ Goodman passed a Joint Study Committee on the Generational Sustainability of Family Farms. It is no secret that the farm economy across the nation is struggling mightily in several key areas. Farms supplying products such as turfgrass, nursery items, and bedding plants are largely performing much better than those producing traditional commodities. This study committee will bring together legislators and stakeholders to examine challenges facing family farms and identify policy solutions to support long-term farm viability and the next generation of farmers. Help is sorely needed.

Legislation that did not pass

There were several initiatives that just did not get through the rigorous policy process, so work continues on many of these initiatives ahead of the 2027 legislative session:

- > **SWEETBAY MAGNOLIA RECOGNITION:** This is a truly puzzling miss. A few years ago, awareness grew that the current state flower, the Cherokee Rose, is not native to Georgia. This simple bill would have changed it to the Sweetbay Magnolia, which is widely supported and is native to our state. It would have also designated April as Georgia Native Plant Month. There was broad support, but it didn't clear all of the obstacles in the final weeks. This must be rectified.
- > **CONSERVATION LAND PROTECTION:** Efforts to extend the current conservation easement tax credit program for five additional years did not pass. The program currently expires at the end of 2026 and has helped establish perpetual green space protections in urban and rural communities. We look to push it again in 2027.
- > **CHANGING THE CLOCK:** Adjusting between standard and daylight saving time is universally maddening...and this bill would have fixed that problem but would have created some new ones. Switching to Atlantic Standard Time did not pass, so the clock change complaining will continue.
- > **WORKPLACE SAFETY:** Some bills get stuck in the process, but this bill didn't need to pass. The Georgia Workplace Safety and Heat Protection Act was a state version of a flawed federal initiative seeking the micromanaging of workers performing services outdoors. We must always be watchful for such bills during future legislative sessions.

The Georgia Urban Agriculture Council will continue working with policymakers and advocating for legislation

that supports our industry, agriculture, and economic growth across Georgia.

Looking ahead

With the legislative session complete, lawmakers focused on their upcoming elections, with the statewide primary scheduled for May 19.

In the months ahead, the Georgia UAC will utilize GrowPAC to support candidates who have supported our industry and policy priorities. We welcome your support of GrowPAC as we continue building relationships with policymakers.



We appreciate Governor Brian Kemp and First Lady Marty Kemp as they conclude their final legislative session before the end of his term. Georgia has made significant progress during his administration, and we are grateful for their leadership and service to our state.

We also want to recognize some outstanding public servants who are retiring: Rep. Lynn Smith, Rep. Jan Jones, and Senator Freddie Powell Sims. We are thankful for their years of service and friendship.

With so many retiring legislators, these policy relationships will come to an end. The Capitol will look different in 2027 - but one thing won't change: UAC will be there, advocating for you every step of the way. 🌐

About the author

Bryan Tolar brings over 25 years of consulting and government affairs experience to best serve the members of the Georgia Urban Ag Council. He spent decades building relationships with state leaders, elected officials and regulatory agency heads. He has earned a reputation as a hard worker with strong integrity and high expectations.



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Cultivating a profession

The roots of the Georgia landscape industry

By Mary Kay Woodworth, Georgia Urban Ag Council

TODAY, THE GEORGIA LANDSCAPE industry is a highly professional, tech-driven powerhouse. But in the 1970s and 80s, it was a "wild west" of local grass-cutters. In those early days, standing out simply meant enforcing basic standards like wearing uniforms, having an employee handbook, and putting a logo on a company truck.

The shift toward professionalism began when visionary leaders—like George Morrell, Spence, Rosenfeld, Bill Russell, Richard Bare and others—realized the value of collaboration. By helping form the Metro Atlanta Landscape & Turf Association (MALTA), now known as the Georgia Urban Ag Council (UAC), they brought fierce competitors together.

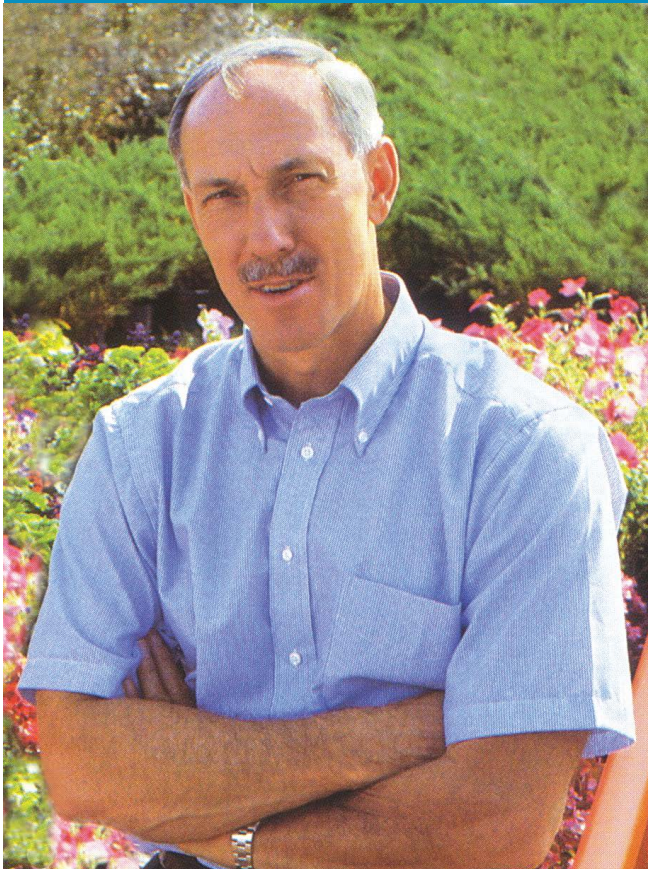
Rather than guarding their secrets, these early pioneers shared contracts, knowledge, and resources to elevate the entire trade.

The ultimate turning point arrived with the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. The global event attracted massive national landscape firms to Georgia, bringing unprecedented competition. Instead of folding, local contractors rose to the occasion. This influx of national talent, combined with strong local mentorship and a commitment to shared growth, transformed Georgia's landscaping scene from a basic utility service into the premier, sophisticated industry it is today.

Join us each issue as we share interviews with industry icons. Our first series includes Richard Bare, Arbor-nomics; Bill Russell, Russell Landscape Group; George Morrell (through Don Smith) and the beloved Georgia Gardener, Walter Reeves.

Our December issue will feature giants from the horticulture, tree care and sod sectors of the industry. Who do you think should be interviewed? Email us with your suggestions!

George Morrell: The patient mentor and industry icon



George Morrell was the President and Owner of The Morrell Group for over two decades, where he established himself as a foundational leader in the Atlanta green industry. Following this, he served as a Principal and senior leader at Omni Landscape for nearly ten years, playing a key role in the firm's significant growth and regional market influence. Morrell passed away in October 2012 following a long, courageous battle with cancer.

While many might hesitate to claim the title of "industry icon," George Morrell's legacy in the Georgia professional landscape industry is undeniable.

As a central figure in the evolution of the state's green industry, Morrell didn't just build a successful company, he helped build the very professional infrastructure that supports thousands of landscape professionals today.

The foundation of a visionary

George's journey began far from the red clay of Georgia. A 1964 graduate of Matawan Regional High School in New Jersey, he was a standout athlete in football and baseball. His passion for the land led him to Clemson University, where he earned a Master's in Horticulture. Upon graduation, he moved to the Atlanta area, trading the gridiron for the green industry and beginning a career that would span four decades.

In the early 1980s, landscaping was often viewed as a local utility service rather than a premier profession. Morrell, first with Clark/Morrell and later through his own ventures, became a pivotal force in changing that perception.

Building the Infrastructure: 1984–1989

Morrell recognized early on that for the industry to thrive, it needed a collective voice and high standards. In 1984, he served as a founding force behind the Metro Atlanta Landscape & Turf Association (MALTA)—the organization known today as the Georgia Urban Ag Council (UAC). He stepped into the role of MALTA President from 1985–1986, using his platform to recruit talent and bridge the gap between Georgia and national organizations like ALCA (now the National Association of Landscape Professionals).

By 1989, he formed The Morrell Group, Inc., which grew into a premier landscape management powerhouse with five divisions and over 200 employees. Under his leadership, the company didn't just compete—it set the standard. In an era before cell phones and ubiquitous internet, Morrell emphasized "the little things" that defined a professional:

- > **BUSINESS SYSTEMS:** Implementing formal maintenance contracts and employee handbooks.
- > **IMAGE & BRANDING:** Requiring uniforms (long pants and shirts) and branding company vehicles to project a corporate image.
- > **OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE:** He was known for "tracking every molecule" of the business, examining every facet to ensure first-class results.

The "open-source" mentor:

A partnership of purpose

Perhaps Morrell's greatest contribution was his "open-source" spirit. He viewed other contractors as colleagues rather than competitors. This philosophy was famously exemplified in his relationship with Don Smith. Long before the official founding of Simply Green Lawn Care, Smith and Morrell shared a professional bond built on a mutual commitment to excellence.

Recognizing a shared vision in Smith, Morrell provided the encouragement and the structural blueprint—including his own business contracts and "trade secrets"—that helped pave the way for the establishment of Simply Green. Their collaboration wasn't limited to the office; they were frequent partners in leadership within MALTA, working side-by-side on industry events and community-driven initiatives like Habitat for Humanity landscape projects.

This spirit of mentorship created a "Morrell DNA" that remains visible today.

"George Morrell created opportunities for me and a lot of others who worked for George. With George's leadership, we embraced becoming professionals in our chosen industry."

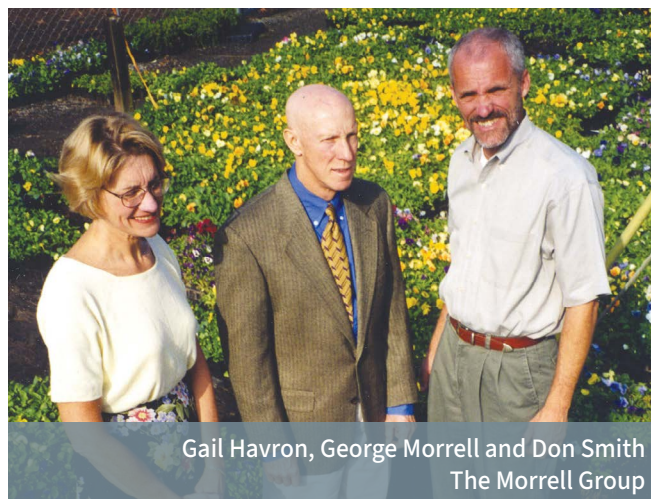
~ Don Smith

A legacy of resilience

In 1993, MALTA honored Morrell with the Pioneer Award for his lifetime of work. However, the mid-90s brought a personal challenge: a diagnosis of Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia in 1996. Despite a 20-year battle with the disease, his commitment to the industry and his personal health never wavered.

"He was really big on 'You are what you eat,' and he was fanatical about working out," recalls longtime friend and industry colleague Dick Bare, CEO of Arbor-Nomics Turf, Inc.

In 1999, as part of his exit strategy, Morrell sold The Morrell Group to national consolidators. The business was eventually acquired by ValleyCrest Companies, where George served as a Vice President until his retirement. He remained active in charitable causes, including the Ronald McDonald House Charities.



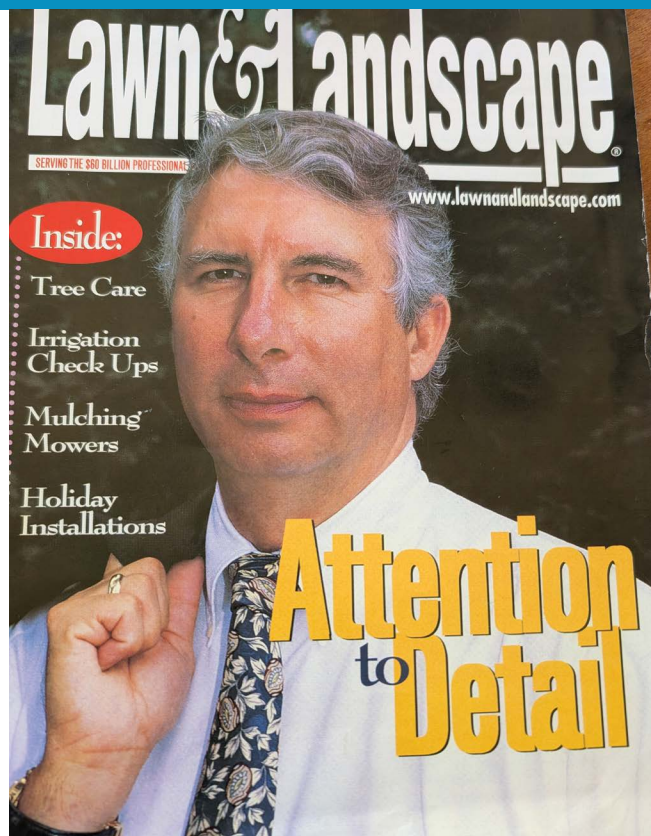
Gail Havron, George Morrell and Don Smith
The Morrell Group

A lasting impact

George Morrell passed away on October 16, 2012, in Naples, Florida. Beyond his business acumen, he is remembered for his deep integrity and discipline. "He was very, very ethical," says Dick Bare. "He looked at the big picture with morality and he was very humble. He was a real born manager, with the way he thought, really into doing a first-class job."

Today, his memory lives on through Simply Green Lawn Care's "George Morrell Customer Service Wall of Fame", established to recognize team members who exceed customer expectations. He proved that leadership isn't just about managing a crew; it's about providing the direction, respect, and shared vision that elevates an entire industry. 🌱

Richard Bare: The vision and legacy



Richard Bare founded Arbor-Nomics Turf in 1980, leading the company for four decades before stepping back from daily operations in September 2020. During this transition, he passed the presidency to his son, Josh Bare, while retaining his role as CEO and owner. In 2024, Arbor-Nomics was acquired by the Senske Family of Companies. Bare continues to influence the industry through his ongoing ownership of Graham Spray Equipment.

THE LUSH, PROFESSIONAL LANDSCAPES that define modern Georgia were not built by chance; they were sculpted by leaders who prioritized systems, science, and a unique sense of community. One of the definitive founders of the industry, Dick Bare, discusses

the evolution of the trade, from its roots in the Midwest to the founding of what we now know as the Georgia Urban Ag Council (UAC).

THE WHY: I grew up in the green industry in Youngstown, Ohio. My family had a large nursery garden center and landscaping company that serviced Youngstown, Cleveland and clients in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, too. After graduating from The Ohio State University, I started my own mowing maintenance company and did landscaping design and installation.

THE EARLY DAYS: The biggest hurdle to professionalizing was probably a hesitancy from the general public to trust franchising or corporate branch growing to end up with a better local service. Remember Walmart put many local stores out of business which angered many small-town residents who valued their relationships with their local vendors.

I believe the industry was pretty professional in the '70s and '80s. The larger firms led the way for start-ups to follow. There were not many books to follow like "The E-Myth" by Michael Gerber or consultants like Tony Bass.

THE TRANSITION: I would say that the growth of ChemLawn, Valley Crest, Brickman, Davey Tree and others brought more professional systems into existence. Post Properties was a key leader in setting the example for very well-designed landscaping installations. Their work was outstanding. The suburban boom was certainly a catalyst for top design installations also. Gibbs Landscape was an award-winning company in this arena.

THE CATALYST AND EVOLUTION: I think I realized the huge scope of our industry when I joined ChemLawn in 1977. They were very prosperous and located in about 18 markets, and they were growing like crazy. Business is all about systems for everything. Bill Grant, who was Executive Vice President, was the man behind that.

THE SHIFT: The suburban boom was certainly a catalyst for top-design installations too. Large Commercial installations were important also. I remember George Morrell landed a contract in Norcross that was a million dollars a year just for the landscape maintenance! George and Don Smith had to develop many systems for such a large project, plus invent some equipment for it, too. Other key people were Dr. Gil Landry, UGA; Dr. Tim Murphy, UGA; Walter Reeves, UGA Extension.

THE PEDIGREE: I would say there are a lot of “Founding Fathers”, i.e., Jim Gibbs, Stan Walker (Shermin’s Nursery), Roy Ashley (leading landscape architect, in charge of the landscaping for the Olympics), Frank Ross (leading consultant for the big major firms), George Morrell and Bob Clark (owned Clark-Morrell, leading landscape installation and maintenance company). Herman Carruth (Triple A Landscape was a number one rated company due to their size); Spence Rosenfeld (ArborGuard Tree Service); Tommy Medlock (OLM), John Williams (Post Properties); Pete Pike (Pike Family Nursery, garden center magnate); Max Graham (Graham Spray Equipment); Walter Reeves (Extension Agent, DeKalb County); Dr. Michael Dirr (UGA) and Dr. Gil Landry (Turfgrass Management. Other key people were Jim King, Regal Chemical; Bill Womak, Leader from the golf course industry; Jay Fountain, LESCO.

UNSUNG INDUSTRY HEROS: George Morrell had Don Smith; Dick Bare had Doug Cash; Herman Carruth had Rick Baird; John Williams had Todd Tibbitts; Spence Rosenfeld had several top assistants; Max Graham had Charlie Halloway; Dr. Gil Landry had Dr. Tim Murphy.

AN ARCHITECT OF CHANGE: My signature impact on the Georgia landscape industry was the inception/birth of the Metro Atlanta Landscape and Turf Association [MALTA] which later added more industries (such as nursery, irrigation and re-wholesaling); hence the name was changed to the Georgia Urban Agriculture Council [UAC].

With meetings occurring monthly, MALTA brought in professional speakers who educated members of the green industry on which kinds of turf grew best here, how accounting should be conducted, how to hire and fire and how to install and maintain landscape plants.



The monthly meetings fostered a comradery among competitors which even featured a large before and after slide show during the Christmas season which was always spectacular.

SIGNIFICANT CHANGE: The biggest and most significant change I’ve seen in my career has to be with the changeover to computers and the internet. The technology improvements are astounding and very necessary if you are servicing thousands of accounts like in lawncare and pest control.

THE PARTNERSHIP. I think associating with people from differing industries caused collaboration between differing green industry sectors. For instance, a landscaper might be at the bar (ordering an iced tea) and he’s standing next to a nurseryman. They begin discussing mutual problems and before the night is over, they strike up a deal for supplying plants for a huge commercial project eliminating the middleman.

THE ACADEMIC INFLUENCE: State and local environmental horticulture and design programs were instrumental in shaping our industry into what it is today. They introduced us to new and better turf varieties, products and systems/equipment which made our work easier and more effective. Why plant St. Augustine for a homeowner when you’ve seen the evidence that it won’t survive here due to many environmental factors?

THE ECONOMIC FACTOR. The drought of 2007-2008 certainly affected the industry, however, most company founders got creative on watering, installing drought-resistant plants and offering savings on landscape installations, i.e., using free woodchips instead of expensive mulches. I think businesses that last a long time have management with very creative juices.

THE SURVIVORS: The survivors changed their marketing, operations and cash outlays to adapt and survive.

THE M&A EVOLUTION: I think the wave of consolidations allowed small firms to raise their prices. Combining operations can drive up costs for both companies, therefore, causing price increases. But larger companies get away with higher prices due to superior marketing, sales forces, scaling from size, etc.

SCALE VS. SERVICE: I think the mega-firms eventually fizzle out due to inferior service, products, etc. Many of the valuable employees that come with the original deals get fired or quit due to poor management by higher-ups who don't understand the green industry where good old personal service rules the day. I like to compare Chik-fil-a to the larger franchises and it boils down to superior service, which attracts higher caliber employees who often have a stake in the success of the business. I personally like ESOPs (Employee Stock Ownership Plan) because everyone has skin in the game and cares about the customer to a higher degree.

THE IMPACT IN IDENTITY: I think industries tend to go through waves. Many firms whose founder has experienced the sale of their company, when their 3-5 year non-compete was over, they cranked the company back up again and succeeded again with their old clients in many cases.

THE NEXT SHIFT: I think the next decade will be defined by both aesthetics and environmental performance because that is what is required to survive in our industry. Someone may plant all the right nursery stock for the location but if it's ugly, they are going out of business because they won't get the word-of-mouth referrals to sustain a good business.

I hope the skill that young entrepreneurs always keep is faith in God and themselves. You can succeed personally and professionally by following the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have done unto you."



ADVICE TO THE NEXT GENERATION:

- > **Gain experience with industry leaders:** After graduating, begin working for one of the top firms in your chosen industry to learn all you can.
- > **Manage capital and expenses:** Keep your personal expenses low while working for others to build up the capital necessary for your own start-up. High personal living costs can make it difficult to meet the capital requirements of a new company in the green industry.
- > **Commit to continuous education:** Read industry-specific books and all recommended business literature, such as *The E-Myth* by Michael Gerber, *First, Break All the Rules* by Marcus Buckingham, *Good to Great* by Jim Collins, and *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie.
- > **Engage with professional organizations:** Join and participate in organizations like the Georgia Urban Ag Council (UAC), the American Nurseryman's Association, and Planet.
- > **Seek mentorship and networking:** Take a successful businessman out to lunch to pick his brain and learn how he achieved his success.
- > **Leverage academic and extension resources:** Stay educated by attending extension events and engaging with university departments that teach Agronomy, Horticulture, and Landscape Architecture.
- > **Prioritize faith and service:** Network with successful individuals at church and pray for a life that allows you to serve others and support great causes.
- > **Maintain personal balance:** Tithe both your time and your income. Ensure you spend quality time with your wife and children, remembering that you work for their well-being as well.

These principles are the foundation that helped Bare successfully start and build his own lawn care company. 

INDUSTRY Icons

This series honors the individuals who built the foundation of Georgia's modern urban ag industry. By celebrating these foundational pioneers, UAC aims to connect the industry's rich history with its future growth and innovation.

Who do you think should be included?

Email suggestions to office@georgiauac.com.



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Bill Russell: Leap of faith to industry powerhouse



Bill Russell (Dr. William E. Russell) is the Founder of Russell Landscape Group, headquartered in Sugar Hill, Georgia. While he remains the face of the company's heritage, he officially stepped back from daily operations in 2018 after selling the business to his son, William "Teddy" Russell II, who now serves as the CEO.

IN AN ERA BEFORE SMARTPHONES, cloud-based software, and automated systems, building a business required something far less tangible—and far more demanding: pure grit. For Bill Russell, founder of Russell Landscape Group, that grit was forged long before his company ever existed.

Raised as a farm boy and the eldest of 35 grandchildren, Russell grew up with a deeply embedded work ethic. His childhood was a masterclass in the cycles of nature and the demands of manual labor—a mindset shaped by equal parts risk and resilience. By the mid-1980s, however, he appeared to have left that rural life behind. He traded the tractor for a briefcase, securing a white-collar role as a regional research director at a Fortune 500 company. From the outside, he had reached the pinnacle of corporate stability.

But from the inside, Russell saw a storm gathering on the horizon.

Seeing around corners

In 1986, while his peers coasted on quarterly successes, Russell recognized a looming shift in the agricultural chemical industry. Two of his company's flagship pesticide products—juggernauts approaching a combined billion dollars in revenue—were nearing the end of their patent protection. He knew that once those patents expired, generic competitors would flood the market, eroding margins and destabilizing the corporate structure he called home.

Where others saw a comfortable career, Russell saw vulnerability. Rather than wait for the inevitable decline, he began asking "What if?" He entered a period of intense discovery, consulting with professors at the University of Georgia, top-tier industry professionals, and even the team at Arnold Palmer's legendary Bay Hill.

The consensus was unanimous: Atlanta was on the precipice of a historic expansion. The city was growing vertically and horizontally, yet the commercial landscaping sector remained fragmented and underserved. On March 15, 1987—Tax Day—Russell Landscape Group was born. He didn't just start a business; he placed a bet on the future of the American South.

"Why would you leave to cut grass?"

The transition from the boardroom to the backyard was anything but glamorous. In the early days, the "Group" in Russell Landscape Group was a generous term; Russell handled everything. He was the salesman, the foreman, the administrator, and the accountant. His days began before sunrise in the field and ended well past midnight over a desk piled with invoices.

With no established systems and no safety net, he encountered a relentless tide of skepticism. "Why would you leave a comfortable Fortune 500 position to cut grass?" was a question he heard constantly. To the cautious observer, Russell's move looked like a step backward. But he possessed a founder's unique brand of productive paranoia and a total absence of a Plan B. "Failure and quitting were never an option," he recalls. "If you want to create the future, you have to make it happen for yourself."

Built on values, not just revenue

As Atlanta grew into an international hub through the 1990s, the landscape industry shifted. Corporate campuses and healthcare facilities began demanding a

level of professionalism that “mow-and-blow” outfits couldn’t provide. Russell was ready. Long before “company culture” became a buzzword, Russell was living it. At Russell Landscape, culture wasn’t written in a manual—it was observed in the way the trucks were washed and the meticulous state of a job site at the end of the day. He instilled a sense of “pride in the asset.” If a piece of equipment broke, it was fixed immediately; if a truck was dirty, it was washed.

Beyond the hardware, Russell emphasized consistency of character. He treated everyone the same—from the high-level facility manager to the janitor in the lobby. Whether he was pulling weeds in a suit or sitting in a church pew, he was the same man. This transparency built a rare level of trust in a transactional industry.

The hard lessons of growth

The path to a multi-state operation was paved with “tuition” payments—costly mistakes that provided invaluable lessons. One of the most significant occurred during the fervor leading up to the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

Russell signed a major contract for a massive highway landscaping project without a formal legal review. What looked like a career-defining opportunity quickly spiraled into a four-year struggle to receive payment. It was a trial by fire that taught him that grit must be paired with professional guardrails.

“Always have your contracts reviewed by experts,” he advised. “And never sign a deal on a Sunday night when you’re tired and just want it done.”

Learning to let go

By the 2010s, Russell Landscape Group had matured into a regional powerhouse. For Russell, this triggered the most difficult psychological shift a founder can face: the transition from operator to leader.

“I had to stop working in the company and start working on the company,” he explains. This required a radical act of trust. He hired leaders who were smarter than him in specific areas, placed them in roles of authority, and held them accountable without micromanaging. He adopted a philosophy of “Inspect what you Expect,” recognizing that while people don’t always do what you hope, they respect the standards you measure.

The power of people

If there is one principle that explains how a one-man startup grew to employ over 1,000 people across the Southeast, it is Russell’s “People First” mandate. While many focus solely on the client, Russell argues the client is the second most important person in the building.

“Your employees are your greatest asset,” he says. “If you take care of them, they will take care of the client.” This belief fueled a culture of shared ownership, where field workers felt as much pride in the company’s “rolling billboards” as the executives.

Shaping an industry

Today, Atlanta’s landscape industry is a far cry from the fragmented market of 1984. It is structured, professionalized, and driven by companies operating with the discipline of any major service sector. Russell’s career has certainly contributed to that transformation.

As the company operates from the Carolinas to Texas, Russell remains the gatekeeper of the fundamentals. He is adamant that four things remain sacred:

- > **Uncompromising ethics:** Integrity is the only currency that never devalues.
- > **Best-in-class service:** “Good” isn’t enough when the client expects excellence.
- > **Pride in presentation:** A dirty truck is a sign of a cluttered mind.
- > **Relational trust:** Communication must be proactive, not reactive.

Keep it between the ditches

Bill Russell’s advice for the next generation is as grounded as the Georgia red clay he spent his life working:

“Keep on keeping on. Make adjustments as you go. And keep it between the ditches.” It is simple, disciplined, and enduring advice. For nearly four decades, it hasn’t just built a company, it has built a legacy. 🌊



Russell with his family, from left: daughter-in-law Courtney, daughter Angie, wife Sherry, Bill, and son Teddy Russell.

Walter Reeves: The Georgia Gardener



Walter Reeves, "The Georgia Gardener," was a legendary horticulturist, writer and broadcaster who served for decades as the state's leading gardening authority. A retired UGA Extension agent, he reached millions through his long-running WSB Radio show, weekly *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* columns, and books on Southern gardening. Despite a ten-year battle with Parkinson's, he remained a devoted mentor to the urban industry until his passing in April 2026.

The foundation of an industry

Walter Reeves was far more than a media personality; he was a foundational architect of Georgia's professional urban agriculture and landscape industry. While his public persona was lighthearted, his influence on the \$10 billion Georgia landscape and nursery economy was profound, effectively bridging the gap between academic research and commercial application.

The architect of professional standards

Walter Reeves' 25-year tenure as a UGA Cooperative Extension Agent was the engine of his career.

While the public loved his radio persona, the industry respected him as the man who professionalized Georgia's landscapes through science-based training.

As an extension agent, Walter acted as the essential "translator" between UGA research labs and the commercial market. He distilled complex data on soil chemistry and plant pathology into Best Management Practices (BMPs) that became the operational standard for the industry and consumers. As a "plant detective" for DeKalb County, he provided a critical link for professionals to identify diseased turf and pests, preventing localized issues from becoming outbreaks.

Leadership and advocacy

A tireless advocate for professional trade organizations, Reeves was a long-time collaborator with the Metro Atlanta Landscape and Turf Association (MALTA)—the predecessor to the Georgia Urban Ag Council (UAC). He helped the industry navigate critical challenges, from drought-related watering restrictions to labor shortages, often using his public platform to communicate industry-wide standards to the general public.

From 1995 to 2020, he served as the emcee for the prestigious Georgia Landscape Awards, setting the bar for high-quality landscape design in the South. His presence added immense credibility to trade shows and conferences, where he frequently highlighted the economic importance of the urban ag industry.

The Walter Reeves Effect

Reeves had a measurable impact on Georgia's retail and service sectors. His "Pick of the Week" on WSB Radio's *The Lawn and Garden Show* created a phenomenon similar to a bestseller list; his endorsement triggered immediate, statewide demand that would frequently see retailers sell out of featured cultivars within hours.

By educating homeowners on proper techniques, Walter created a sophisticated client. He encouraged consumers to seek out GCLP-certified professionals and members of state trade associations, shifting the market toward quality and expertise over the lowest price. His advocacy for Georgia-grown products, particularly warm-season grasses like Zoysia and Bermuda hybrids, directly bolstered the state's sod farms and nurseries.

A science-based legacy

Walter's "Right Plant, Right Place" mantra became the unofficial gold standard for professional design. This philosophy reduced plant failures and warranty claims for contractors while forcing the industry to look beyond the instant landscape toward sustainable, long-term growth planning. By emphasizing mature plant size, he championed landscapes that required less corrective pruning and fewer chemical interventions.

The sherlock of shrubbery

Walter Reeves hosted *The Lawn and Garden Show* on 95.5 WSB, a Saturday morning staple in Atlanta for 26 years, airing from 1994 until his retirement in 2020, but he continued to share seasonal advice on the *Green and Growing* program with Ashley Frasca.

Even in his later years, he remained dedicated to mentoring young horticulturists and promoting the 4-H program as a vital pipeline for future leaders. Walter ensured his vast repository of knowledge—housed on his website and through decades of recordings—would remain a permanent resource for the next generation of Georgia's green industry professionals.

Walter Reeves passed away on Friday, April 10, 2026, at the age of 74, following a long and courageous battle with Parkinson's disease. His passing was marked by a special tribute broadcast on WSB's *Green and Growing*, honoring a man who viewed the landscape industry as a craft requiring constant study.

His death marks the end of an era, but his influence is physically visible in every well-pruned crape myrtle and healthy lawn across the state of Georgia. He didn't just teach people how to garden; he taught an entire industry how to grow. Walter's presence brought a level of trust and scientific authority that was unmatched in the Southeast. 🌿



"Walter didn't just teach us how to grow plants; he taught us how to grow as people and as a community. His voice will forever be in the ears of every gardener in Georgia."

~ Mary Kay Woodworth



Reeves began hosting the Lawn & Garden Show on Atlanta's WSB Radio on January 15, 1994.





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Plant choices for drought

Keep in mind BMPs and lessons learned

By Bodie Pennisi, Dept. of Horticulture, Professor and Vincent J. Dooley Endowed Chair of Ornamental Horticulture, and Heather Kirk-Ballard, Dept. of Horticulture, Assistant Professor, University of Georgia

Being in the humid subtropics, Georgia gets plenty of rain but not all of it comes when we need it – steady and consistent from April till November (and for us in the must-have-color-year-round business – this really means year-round). This spring we find ourselves facing water deficits that may stretch well into summer. It may feel like a new experience but for those of us who have been around longer, we remember the drought of 2006-2009. Many water conservation practices and recommendations were developed during that time, so what we need to do as we prepare for the season is remind ourselves and our clients to keep it in perspective and apply these good and solid principles which have taken us through tough (and tougher) times. And while it may seem like an interesting idea, remind your clients that cacti overall do not do well in the Georgia landscape.

In the landscape, there are many factors that can reduce the need to provide supplemental water (irrigation). Because these factors are so complex The UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences recommends a holistic approach involving Best Management Practices (BMPs) to obtain maximum landscape sustainability and water efficiency. One of the principles in BMPs is selecting proper plants to install in specific landscape microenvironments, such as a cool and moist northern exposure versus hot and dry southern exposure.

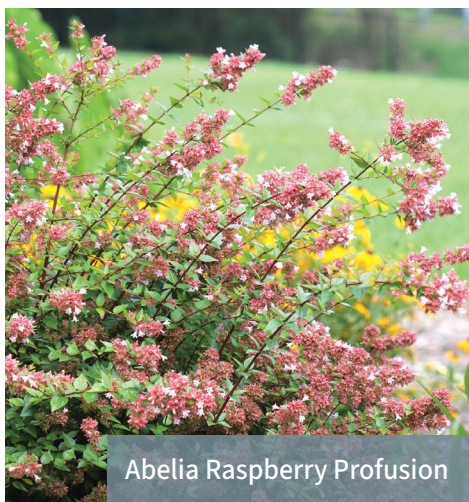
Landscape plant selection plays a large role in water conservation, but the results would be even better when combined with optimal planting and management

practices. Research has also shown that: 1) landscape plants vary in the amount of water they use, and/or their survival in drought, depending on species and cultivar, and environmental conditions, and 2) landscape soil moisture storage is restricted by soil characteristics and on the depth and efficiency of roots.

Two basic realities are that landscape plants consume water and survive within the limits of moisture from nature (rain) and from management (irrigation), and that water applied more than the plant uses results in runoff to canals and ponds, and/or percolation to the surficial aquifer.

There are four ways by which managers could affect the use of water in the landscape: 1) change their watering practices; 2) select and use plants which need less water to survive and perform; 3) modify the soil to increase the available soil moisture; and 4) change the microenvironment to encourage lower evapotranspiration. In this short article, we're focusing on #2, but the importance of and the interaction among all four ways should not be ignored.

By utilizing appropriate cultural practices, most plant material grown in Georgia should perform well with minimal to NO irrigation. Keeping this in mind, below is a short list of plants that are known to have good drought-tolerance, good pest resistance and adaptability to a wide range of soils and environmental conditions in Georgia. When selecting trees and shrubs, consider their mature size and provide sufficient growing space.



Abelia Raspberry Profusion



Kniphofia uvaria



Achillea Sunny Seduction

Common Name Botanical Name**TREES**

American Holly	<i>Ilex opaca</i>
Bald Cypress	<i>Taxodium distichum</i>
Goldenraintree	<i>Koelreuteria bipinnata</i>
Chestnut Oak	<i>Quercus prinus</i>
Chinese Pistache	<i>Pistacia chinensis</i>
Crape Myrtle	<i>Lagerstroemia indica</i>
Deodar Cedar	<i>Cedrus deodara</i>
European Hornbeam	<i>Carpinus betulus</i>
Foster Holly	<i>Ilex x attenuata</i>
Ginkgo	<i>Ginkgo biloba</i>
Hedge Maple	<i>Acer campestre</i>
Japanese Zelkova	<i>Zelkova serrata</i>
Lacebark Elm	<i>Ulmus parvifolia</i>
Laurel Oak	<i>Quercus hemisphaerica</i>
Needle Palm	<i>Rhapidophyllum hystrix</i>
Nellie R. Stevens	<i>Holly Ilex 'Nellie R. Stevens'</i>
Overcup Oak	<i>Quercus lyrata</i>
Pin Oak	<i>Quercus palustris</i>
Sawtooth Oak	<i>Quercus acutissima</i>
Shumard Oak	<i>Quercus shumardii</i>
Southern Magnolia	<i>Magnolia grandiflora</i>
Trident Maple	<i>Acer buergerianum</i>
Willow Oak	<i>Quercus phellos</i>
Windmill Palm	<i>Trachycarpus fortunei</i>
Yaupon Holly	<i>Ilex vomitoria</i>

SHRUBS

Distylium	<i>Distylium</i>
Dwarf Yaupon Holly	<i>Ilex vomitoria 'Nana'</i>
Tea-olive	<i>Osmanthus x fortunei</i>
Forsythia	<i>Forsythia x intermedia</i>
Fragrant Tea-olive	<i>Osmanthus fragrans</i>
Glossy Abelia	<i>Abelia x</i>
Japanese Aucuba	<i>Aucuba japonica</i>
Japanese Cleyera	<i>Ternstroemia gymnanthera</i>
Japanese Spirea	<i>Spiraea japonica</i>
Juniper	<i>Juniper spp.</i>
Leatherleaf Viburnum	<i>Viburnum rhytidophyllum</i>
Prague Viburnum	<i>Viburnum x pragense</i>
Southern Waxmyrtle	<i>Myrica cerifera</i>
Thunberg Spirea	<i>Spiraea thunbergii</i>

In the next article, we'll revisit plant growth with respect to water and learn to spot signs of short-term and long-term drought. 

For additional information:

Scan here:
Best management practices in the landscape



Scan here:
Tips for saving water in the landscape

Common Name Botanical Name**VINES/GROUNDCOVERS**

Mondograss	<i>Ophiopogon japonicus</i>
Carolina Yellow Jessamine	<i>Gelsemium sempervirens</i>
Confederate Jasmine	<i>Trachelospermum</i> <i>jasmuinoides</i>
Creeping Juniper	<i>Juniperus horizontalis</i>
Creeping Phlox	<i>Phlox subulata</i>
Shore Juniper	<i>Juniperus conferta</i>
Trumpet Honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera sempervirens</i>
Trumpetcreeper	<i>Campsis</i>

HERBACEOUS PERENNIALS

Black-eyed Susan	<i>Rudbeckia spp.</i>
Blue Anise Sage	<i>Salvia guaranitica</i>
Butterfly Weed	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>
Yarrow	<i>Achillea</i>
Daylily	<i>Hemerocallis</i>
False Blue Indigo	<i>Baptisia australis</i>
Gaura	<i>Guara lindheimeri</i>
Goldenrod Hybrids	<i>Solidago hybrida</i>
Lamb's-Ears	<i>Stachys byzantina</i>
Mexican Sage	<i>Salvia leucantha</i>
Purple Coneflower	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>
Red Hot Poker	<i>Kniphofia uvaria</i>
Rosemary	<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>
Russian Sage	<i>Salvia yangi</i>
Sedum (Stonecrop)	<i>Sedum spp.</i>
Speedwell	<i>Veronica</i>
Texas Sage	<i>Salvia greggii</i>

ANNUALS

Annual Periwinkle	<i>Catharanthus</i>
Blanket Flower	<i>Gaillardia</i>
Celosia, Cock's comb	<i>Celosia</i>
Globe Amaranth	<i>Gomphrena</i>
Lantana	<i>Lantana</i>
Moss Rose (Purslane)	<i>Portulaca grandiflora</i>
Narrow-leaf Zinnia	<i>Zinnia angustifolia</i>
Purple Heart	<i>Setcreasea purpurea</i>
Rudbeckia	<i>Rudbeckia</i>

Resilient by design

Engineering the future of water-wise landscapes

By Heather Kirk-Ballard, University of Georgia; Brandy Hall, Shades of Green Permaculture; and Pam Dooley, Plants Creative Landscapes



Heather Kirk-Ballard, Brandy Hall, and Pam Dooley share their insider knowledge on water-wise landscapes.

HORTICULTURE HAS LONG BEEN called the “agriculture we bring home every day.” Whether you’re a designer, a grower, a maintenance contractor, or an educator, you’re part of an industry currently being forced to rewrite the rulebook.

Our climate is shifting toward extremes, swinging violently between “flash droughts” and record-breaking deluges, and the old ways of managing landscapes are no longer holding up.

At a recent UAC Annual Networking and Education event at Topiary Courtyard, we sat down with three industry experts: Dr. Heather Kirk-Ballard (Assistant Professor of Sustainable Urban Landscape), Brandy Hall (Owner of Shades of Green Permaculture), and Pam Dooley (Owner of Plants Creative Landscapes) to talk about the path forward. Their consensus was clear: to build a resilient future, we must stop viewing water as a nuisance to be moved away and start engineering landscapes that act as living sponges.

The “new normal”

Traditional maintenance schedules are breaking down. Regions such as Georgia and the Southeast that once relied on steady, moderate rainfall are now hitting “exceptional drought” status by mid-spring, only to be hit with extreme weather events later in the season. These

cycles cause massive physiological stress for our plants and structural stress for our infrastructure.

In many suburban landscapes, the water cycle is effectively broken. Rain hits hard surfaces - roofs, driveways, or even turf mowed too short (which can have up to an 85% runoff coefficient) - and is immediately funneled into storm drains. This approach doesn't just feed flash floods; it leaves the local water table unreplenished and leads to hydrophobic, compacted soil.

Three pillars of regenerative design

To combat this, we need to shift from passive maintenance to active, regenerative design.

- 1. SOIL: THE LIVING FOUNDATION.** Resilience starts underground. Healthy soil is your best reservoir.
 - > **Organic matter:** Regular compost applications improve soil structure, allowing the ground to hold moisture through dry spells.
 - > **Mechanical aeration:** Essential for breaking up heavy clay to ensure oxygen and water reach the root zone.
 - > **Deep watering:** Move your clients away from daily, shallow irrigation. Encourage “slow and deep” watering (ideally between 4:00 AM and 6:00 AM) to force roots to dive deep toward the water table.
- 2. THE MANTRA: “SLOW IT, SINK IT, SPREAD IT.”** Stop fighting stormwater; treat it as an asset.

- > **Rain gardens and swales:** These are engineered depressions filled with pervious soil (a 70/30 compost-to-sand mix is often more resilient than the standard 50/50). They are designed to sink water within 12 hours.
- > **Professional catchment:** Catchment: While rain barrels are popular, they are often undersized. For true resilience, professional installations should look toward cisterns (500+ gallons) utilizing inverted siphons to gravity-feed and store water for future drought.

3. STRATEGIC PLANT SELECTION. Don't get hung up on a "natives-only" vs. "traditional" debate. Build a community that works.

- > **Natives as workhorses:** Species like Muhly grass or Joe Pye weed (among others) have deep root systems that physically break through clay hardpan.
- > **The role of cultivars:** Don't ignore non-native, improved cultivars. They offer predictable growth habits, disease resistance, and heat tolerance. When you pair these "tough-as-nails" plants with native communities, you ensure the landscape stays beautiful and functional even when native species go dormant under extreme stress.

Prioritizing "living capital"

When water is scarce, you must act as a consultant. Help your clients prioritize their investment:

- > **High priority: trees and shrubs.** Replacing a mature oak or a large privacy hedge is a \$5,000–\$8,000 hit. Once they decline, they are incredibly hard to save.
- > **Low priority: turf and annuals.** Turfgrass is incredibly resilient and can go dormant for weeks, greening up quickly once water returns. Education is key here—teach your clients not to overwater turfgrass and annuals at the expense of their canopy.

Expert Insights

Q. HOW DO YOU SIMPLIFY "REGENERATION" FOR A CLIENT?

Brandy: It's about closing loops. We stop hauling leaves off-site and start using them to build fertility. We stop treating water like trash and start treating it like the foundation of the garden.

Q. HOW DO WE MAKE WATER-WISE DESIGN MAINSTREAM WHEN FACING BUDGET CONSTRAINTS?

Brandy: Education is key. We have to show that spending a little more on the front end saves

massive costs on the back end. Furthermore, cities are beginning to mandate "green infrastructure" because it is cheaper than constantly upsizing municipal storm drains with taxpayer money.

Q. WHY DO YOU SUGGEST AVOIDING FRENCH DRAINS IN CLAY SOIL?

Brandy: French drains often act as a reactive, "get it away" solution that doesn't work well in heavy clay. Reframing the problem means moving toward "sinking it in." If we build soil and plant deep-rooted communities, we influence the heat dynamics of the site and create a more resilient landscape.

Q. WHAT SKILLS DO NEW PROS NEED MOST?

Heather: Observation. Textbooks are a starting point, but you have to be able to read plant stress signals and understand microclimates in real-time. You need to be a data-driven problem solver.

Q. HOW DO WE SELL THESE DESIGNS WHEN BUDGETS ARE TIGHT?

Brandy: Lead with cost-benefit education. A higher upfront investment in green infrastructure is significantly cheaper than the long-term cost of maintenance and replacing failed plant material. Municipalities are catching on—it's cheaper to build a rain garden than to upsize a storm drain.

Q. WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILL FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF HORTICULTURISTS?

Heather: Adaptation and observation. We can no longer count on "average" conditions. Students must learn to read plant stress signals and microclimates, making data-driven decisions rather than relying on outdated textbooks

Q. WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR LANDSCAPES?

Heather: The passion of the students. They are engaged and not afraid to hold us accountable for sustainability. **Brandy:** Seeing people build a relationship with their land. When a neighbor sees a successful water-wise garden, they want one too. It's small solutions that add up to a really big impact.

Big Picture Water is the organizing principle of all life. By shifting from a reactive "drainage" mindset to a proactive "catchment" design, we can protect our high-value assets (like trees) and build landscapes that thrive even in the face of a changing climate. 🌱

Want to see this in action? Visit the Green Infrastructure Demonstration Site at UGA Griffin. It showcases nine best management practices, including bioswales, permeable pavers, cistern systems, and new cultivar trials. It is free to visit, open to the public weekdays from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. The Garden is located at 129 W. Ellis Road in Griffin, Georgia.

The shift from owner to seller

Two founders' journeys through acquisition

By Devon Phillips, Georgia Urban Ag Council



Todd Guilmette | Unique Environmental



Jim McCutcheon | HighGrove Partners

YOUR VISION OF SELLING YOUR business and the reality can be two different things. Long-time UAC members **Todd Guilmette** and **Jim McCutcheon** encourage others to look inward first, moving beyond the numbers to the blunt reality of what a sale actually means for a founder.

How did you prepare your company for an eventual sale?

JM: This is a hard business. It's not something we take lightly. We're in it, working outside, because we want to be in it. I spent several years before the transaction doing research. I sought out business owners who had sold their companies and listened to their stories first. Was it a family legacy? Was it an outside company that approached them? Those conversations allowed me to form opinions on what might be best for HighGrove Partners.

TG: I was seeking the best fit. I started five to six years ahead of time to prepare for this. I wanted to understand how things were valued. Then, I pivoted my company to increase those values. At one point,

Unique Environmental was very focused on design, build, install contracts. We loved the creativity. Our staff made some incredible things happen. But, a buyer does not necessarily value one-off projects. I had to flip my model the other way to get the recurring revenue where it needed to be. This was one crucial step that helped create long term wealth and a true retirement plan.

Mergers and acquisitions are happening more often. What are the consequences?

JM: As far as how it leaves the market, I think there is plenty of opportunity still there.

TG: There is no reason to be intimidated. As the industry matures, acquisitions are a natural part of growth. One positive side effect of this trend is professionalizing the career path. Landscape employees want to work for a company that provides stability, benefits, and a method to save for retirement. They want to grow as people while at work. This process allows all of that to happen more often.

Which professional services helped guide you through this process?

TG: Don't go it alone. Seek coaching from business counselors and experienced advisors long before the deal is on the table. I used Jeff Harkness and his team at 3PG Advisors for this task. I've been with them for over 20 years. They've served me as a business counselor, giving feedback along the way. We were on a long term trajectory.

JM: You need to decide if you want to put your business on the market yourself, or pursue a sale through a broker. I used the investment banking firm CCG Advisors. They know the industry better than anyone. Before you get under LOI (a letter of intent outlining the preliminary commitment between two parties), you must have a great attorney. Because I assure you, the other side does. It's absolutely necessary to hire a business attorney with specific experience in landscape acquisitions... and someone who has the gumption to stand up for you.

What business processes changed once your business was acquired? When you acquire a business, what do you change?

TG: There were certain things I was very firm in keeping. I wanted all of my employees to maintain the same paid time off. I also included a clause to protect employees' jobs for a certain amount of time after the closing.

JM: Things are done incrementally and decisions are made thoughtfully. Do we just magically reduce the number of account managers from 6 to 4 in one zip code? No. One thing that happens is things are streamlined, from purchasing to communication. Implementing systems like Aspire (the industry "gold standard" for an ERP, or enterprise resource planning) is one thing that helps. It's a software system that includes all the tools and processes required to run a successful company.

What is the due diligence process like before closing?

JM: The due diligence period is a gauntlet. Sometimes it feels like it'll never be over, but I promise, it does eventually end. The overall goal is preparing for a debt-free transition. The labor audit is a critical area that trips a lot of people up, requiring a deep dive into I-9s, E-Verify, and training manuals. In your financials, there will be a deep cleaning of P&Ls, balance sheets, and tax records.

TG: One process that I'll never forget was the equipment inventory and the pain of creating accurate, serialized equipment lists for CPAs.

How did you tell your employees?

TG: Before I told them, I was doing a lot of this prep work after hours. There are certain things you can't say for a while; you can't let the cat out of the bag too soon. You can't erode their confidence. When you first start this, you think it's about you. And how you're going to make it happen. Then it all pivots, and you realize, it's about them. You want to make sure they feel confident. You're dealing with people's lives who have invested in a company. Two and a half years after the acquisition, ninety-five percent of my employees are still there.

JM: Nothing changed for them, so we told them after the transaction had happened. I wanted to keep things consistent for them. I've got people working for HighGrove whose children now work there too. And the other way around -- there are employees who have recruited their parents to come work for us. It's really special.

How has life been after the sale?

TG: You put so much of your life into your business, and it's hard to let it go. It's a very emotional journey when you have such a passion for the work and your team. It took me an additional year to truly process it. I now look at it as what I did, instead of what I'm doing. I'm good with how it all happened.

JM: I'm focusing on successful integration of new acquisitions. What I struggle with now, is, if we're going to integrate, we've got to have a continuation of culture for all the other companies. There's always been a focus on HighGrove Atlanta. Now we've got people all over the Southeast. It's more about expanding that culture and helping it come to the other places.

What advice would you give to owners who are still in the midst of their career?

JM: When somebody is trying to figure out whether or not they want to do this, don't think of it as a quick path out. Think of preparing for acquisition as a really robust way to strengthen all of your business processes.

TG: Don't be threatened by large acquisitions in the market. Turn it into a positive. Use local ownership as a marketing advantage: "We're locally owned... We're gonna give you better service." Acquisitions can actually help smaller players by leaving behind smaller accounts that the big firms no longer find profitable. Never be fearful of the opportunity to gain more market share. 🌊

Trees and lawns

Encouraging a beneficial partnership

By Tiana Deeb, Environmental Science Undergraduate; Dr. Bodie Pennisi, Vincent J. Dooley Endowed Professor of Ornamental Horticulture and an Extension Specialist; Dr. Jason Gordon, Associate Professor of Community Forestry with the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources; Dr. Clint Waltz, Extension Specialist - Turfgrass, Crop & Soil Sciences; University of Georgia



Several healthy trees, young and mature, surrounded by a maintained lawn on the UGA-Griffin campus.

FROM OUR ICONIC PINES, COLORFUL maples, elegant poplars, to stately oaks – trees are an inseparable and meaningful part of our landscapes.

Trees have many benefits.

- > Healthy, established trees alleviate urban heat island effect - the phenomena of increased temperatures in urban areas due to pavement and structures reflecting and emitting more heat.
- > Through the process of transpiration, trees produce cool shade and lower utility costs during the hot summer.
- > Their root systems act as subterranean structures that bind soils, especially important in areas near water and in some of Georgia's hillier regions.
- > Trees help regulate the water cycle, reduce storm water runoff and flooding due to the large amounts of water that their roots absorb and recycle back into the atmosphere.
- > Trees support native fauna as well as feed and shelter pollinators and migratory and seasonal birds.
- > Research shows that trees can help with physical, mental and emotional well-being.

Properly caring for these valuable assets and maintaining their health is crucial.

Lawns are also inseparable from the urban landscape: they too offer environmental services.

- > Like trees, lawns are also plants, absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen, which helps improve air quality.
- > The dense root systems of well-maintained lawns stabilize the soil.
- > Grass assists in erosion control. Their foliage lessens the impact of raindrops and slows down the velocity of runoff, which reduces the erosion and loss of soil from your property and decreases pollution of nearby streams and waterways from pesticides and sediment.
- > In place of hardscaping, turfgrass can be planted in urban areas to help with temperature regulation by cooling the surrounding areas. Like trees, grass does evaporative cooling through the process of transpiration, making environments more comfortable during hot weather.

However, problems can arise when trees and lawn occupy the same space, compete for the same resources, and are subject to identical maintenance routines. Many lawncare practices do not consider the presence and needs of nearby trees. These practices - while beneficial to turfgrass - can unintentionally compromise tree health. This accidental harm can be significant and often underestimated, considering the value that healthy trees add to a landscape, and conversely, the serious risks that declining or structurally compromised trees can pose to people, pets, and property. In many landscapes, lawns receive far more attention than trees, with greater focus placed on fertilizing, treating pest and disease problems, controlling weeds, and mowing. Trees are often overlooked, receiving minimal care beyond occasional pruning.

This article seeks to shed light on the often-overlooked tension between lawn and tree care, and to provide practical guidance for encouraging a more balanced, mutually supportive partnership within the landscape.

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Some common lawncare practices may result in trees being overwatered, overfertilized, and otherwise stressed. A stressed tree can eventually be at risk of part or whole tree failure. Alternative turf maintenance approaches can improve the overall health of trees, while still ensuring a beautiful, healthy lawn.

Explore the possibility of keeping lawns fertilized, watered, mowed, and mostly free of weeds, while also being mindful of the trees. The suggestions made in this article will be more beneficial for the whole landscape, including the grass and trees, than many mainstream practices that focus solely on lawns. Take a “landscape care” approach, as opposed to just a “lawncare” approach. Prioritizing tree health doesn’t have to be a compromise for the lawn (and vice versa), as long as a few considerations are made.

Symptoms and signs of stress, disease, or damage to trees

Trees and grass come into conflict over several common lawncare or landscape maintenance factors, including but not limited to, irrigation, alteration of the drainage patterns or site topography, pesticide use, fertilizer application, string trimmer and mower use, compacted soil, exposed roots, excessive shade, and any combination thereof. Many of these conflicts can be mitigated through thoughtful landscape planning, species selection, and in some cases by physically separating trees and grass - such as removing grass beneath certain tree species - to reduce competition.

Sometimes when trees are negatively impacted by certain lawn maintenance practices or other stressors, they do not always display obvious or immediate symptoms.



Two mature trees’ root flares. The root flare is where the trunk flares out, meets the ground, and the large buttress roots should be exposed and visible. It is best to mulch around these roots, or at least keep grass off them, so that there is no risk of physical damage to these important roots when maintaining the grass.

However, there are some signs that indicate that trees are in trouble. Common stress symptoms present themselves in the canopy or crown.

- > Yellowing or browning of the leaves could indicate overwatering or underwatering.
- > Browning along the leaf margins (the edges or perimeter of each leaf) or leaf curling or deformity could indicate herbicide damage (more on this later).
- > Pale-colored or yellowed leaves (also called chlorosis) could imply improper pH, poor soil nutrition, or disease.
- > Signs of decline may be indicated by many of the canopy branches dying back from the tips (tip dieback), entire branches dying or failing, or premature leaf drop.

The best way to ensure trees’ well-being is awareness, observation, and mitigation of the potential stressors discussed in this, and subsequent, sections.

If you notice any of the above symptoms in your trees, it is best to contact someone specialized in diagnosing and treating trees. An arborist certified by the International Society of Arboriculture can determine tree health problems. While the generalities in this article may help you become more attuned to your trees’ well-being, make sure to seek the guidance and recommendations of an expert. You can find Certified Arborists near you, and verify credentials, by visiting: treesaregood.org/findanarborist. Refer, also, to UGA’s extension publication on *Hiring a Tree Care Service* for tips on how to employ an arborist (Mickler et al., 2022).

A tree’s root flare should be taken into special consideration and protected (see photos below). If a mature tree has a healthy root flare, then there will often be some large, exposed roots close to the base of the tree. Mowing around the exposed tree roots can pose a risk of injury to the tree. Additionally, some tree species produce surface roots (e.g. maples), which should be considered when selecting trees to plant in or amongst a lawn space. Whenever tasked with mowing around or over exposed roots, you should float the mower deck by raising the deck to a higher cut height setting to avoid accidentally injuring the tree’s roots.

Repeated mower damage to roots stresses the tree over time, increasing susceptibility to insects, fungi, and other disease-causing organisms, while also restricting water and nutrient uptake- not to mention the damage it can also cause to the mower or operator. Mulch areas around trees so that there is a barrier between exposed parts of the tree and grass that needs to be maintained as another way to lessen mechanical damage to trees.

Physical damage incurred by some mechanical maintenance lawn care practices has significant negative impacts on tree health. A tree's most important vascular tissue lies just below the bark, and certain tree species have thinner bark than others. Injury from a string trimmer (weed eater) can be devastating to a tree. Protecting young trees from this damage is especially important since they have not yet established a thick layer of protective bark. Avoid potential damage by placing a barrier around the trunk and root flare. A tree guard/protector made of rigid plastic mesh is better than a tube because it allows light. For larger trees, you can use a thin sheet of metal or scrap wood to use as a shield and move around while weed eating.

While certain turf practices can stress trees, the opposite also can be true, trees can stress turf - the most notable conflict being shade and competition for underground resources. Most grass species do not tolerate shade well. Proper turfgrass and tree species selection is crucial when working with a new space or when deciding to plant new trees in an established lawn. Avoid tree species that have dense canopies when trying to integrate trees in a lawn.

Designating mulched areas around trees helps reduce competition for water and nutrients by creating a natural barrier between the trees and the surrounding lawn. A delicate balance of care requires careful consideration, for trees and grass, to care for them both properly and reduce potentially harmful repercussions.

Trees can be harmed by pesticides (particularly herbicides)

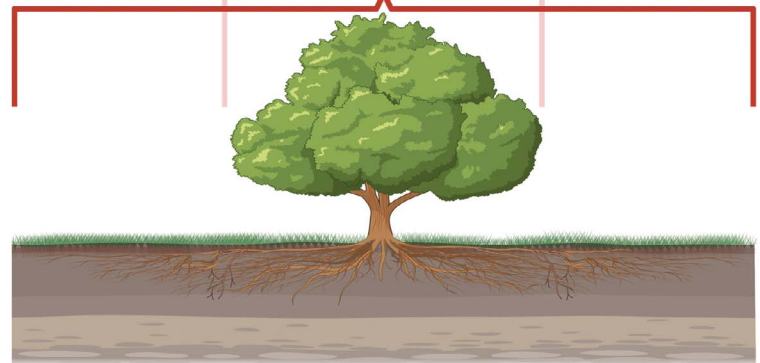
One tree's root zone can span two to three times the width of the canopy. Note the possibility that a mature tree's root system may be occupying a larger portion of a landscape than you may think. This should be a consideration when applying chemicals to a lawn.

Different herbicides target different types of plants, which will be listed on the label. Most trees fall under the broad classification of "broadleaf plants," the same classification as many weed species.

Trees could be negatively impacted by the application of broadleaf weedkillers commonly applied to the lawn. Always read the label of any chemical to be applied. When reviewing product labels, look for the active ingredients commonly found in selective broadleaf herbicides, such as 2,4-D, dicamba, MCPP (mecoprop), MCPA, or triclopyr, as these will target trees. Also note that pines and other conifers that don't fall under the

The Critical Root Zone (CRZ) lies beneath the canopy's drip line, where roots are most concentrated.

The entire root system can extend 2–3 times beyond the canopy's spread, far wider than the CRZ.



A tree's critical root zone is the area of roots located just beneath the drip zone of the canopy, but that the entirety of a tree's root zone extends from the base of the tree and out, approximately three times the spread of the canopy.

Created in BioRender. Deeb, T. (2025) <https://BioRender.com/w05wa9m>



Phenoxycarboxylic acid (e.g. 2,4-D) and Benzoic acid (e.g. dicamba) herbicide damage to trees: twisting of the leaf petiole (epinasty), turning or curling the leaf upside down, downward cupping of leaves, and narrow strap-like leaves on youngest growth. *Source: Paul Pugliese*



Herbicide damage. *Source: Jason Sharman, Vitalitree, Bugwood.org*

classification of broadleaf plants can still potentially be harmed by certain types of lawn herbicides.

Weed and feed fertilizers are another category of herbicide products worth mentioning. These combinations of fertilizer and broad-spectrum herbicides are intended to be spread across the lawn as an all-in-one solution that fertilizes the grass, while ridding it of weeds. These products contain broadleaf weedkillers, which can harm trees.

When developing a maintenance weed schedule for a lawn, be specific and selective (as opposed to a broad dispersal or application). This involves proper weed identification, selecting the correct herbicide for the undesired plant (make sure to read the label), and then applying the herbicide in a way that limits the risk of exposure to trees.

Herbicides should be used selectively and carefully, applying the product as physically close to the “weed” as possible, rather than broadcasting the product throughout the yard. Avoid spraying on windy days to decrease the risk of chemical drift (unintentional contact with non-targeted plants), specifically avoiding any spray getting on the leaves of trees. Pre-emergent herbicides are generally considered safer to use around trees because they work by keeping weed seeds from sprouting. Mature trees should not be affected as long as the product is applied correctly, according to label directions.

Pathogenic fungi and insect pests can be damaging to the landscape. Fungal infections in lawns are not uncommon and often require treatment. Check out the UGA Extension publication *Turfgrass Diseases in Georgia: Identification and Control* for help in identifying some telltale signs of an infection (Burpee & Martinez, 2025). However, also keep in mind that not all microorganisms and insects are harmful. Beneficial fungal networks (mycorrhizae) and microbial communities exist in healthy soil, and these networks help your plants (especially trees) absorb essential nutrients. Beneficial insects also help pollinate flowering trees and fight off insect pests. These organisms can be negatively impacted by some fungicides and insecticides.

When faced with a fungal infection in your lawn, it would be beneficial to first try organic fungicides (like copper soaps and neem oil) that would be less detrimental to the pre-existing soil fungal networks. Check out Purdue University’s Extension publication, *Disease Management Strategies: Using Organic Fungicides* (Beckerman, 2008).

If you use a non-organic option for treating persistent fungal infections, try using a systemic spray application rather than a granular option. Systemic pesticides absorb into plant tissues and are transported through the plant. This method of control keeps the fungicide within the plants, rather than in the soil, to minimize impact on the beneficial subterranean fungal networks. If you choose an optimal grass species complementary to your landscape, and practice proper watering methods (mentioned in part 2 of this article), the risk of fungal problems and costs of fungicide application to your turf will be substantially reduced.

If faced with an insect pest problem in your lawn or trees, make sure to first accurately identify the pest, so that you know what treatment method to utilize. Check out the UGA Extension publication, *Home Turf Insect Control*, to learn more about common insect pests and treatment recommendations (Hudson, 2020). Also check out the PDF, *Tree Insects*, for help identifying common pests that affect trees (Banks, n.d.).

After correct identification and deciding your method of attack, make sure to always read the label of the pesticide for proper application dosage, protocols, and safety/exposure concerns. Contact your county agent to help you identify the pest. Also, try to be mindful of beneficial insects when choosing the treatment method. Read over the UGA publication, *Management of Turfgrass Insect Pests and Pollinator Protection*, for tips on how to do minimal harm (Joseph & Bauske, 2020).

Fertilizers are not one-size-fits-all

Trees are slow-growing organisms that do not need to be fertilized regularly. They would benefit more from regular applications of organic matter, like compost, mulch, and not raking away fallen leaves. Grass, on the other hand, would benefit from more frequent fertilizer applications to keep up with its faster growth. Increasing your knowledge of fertilizers and the different types that are available is essential in creating a balance that accommodates these different preferences.

Fertilizers contain essential nutrients for plants, and they are available for both trees and grass, in either synthetic or organic form. Fertilizers contain varying combinations of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium (and in some formulations additional nutrients), the three elements needed in the highest quantities by plants. The fertilizer label shows how much of each of the three nutrients are present and their ratio (N-P-K). For example, a common “balanced” fertilizer might have a 10-10-10 formula (1:1:1 ratio), or a higher nitrogen fertilizer might be labeled 20-10-10.



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Example of leaving the leaves around a tree's base. This is a form of mulching that uses the tree's own resources for protection, water retention, and nutrition.

Make sure to choose the correct fertilizer for the plant you are growing and the specific site. Different plants have varying nutritional needs, and all soils are not the same.

pH is one of the most influential factors of the soil, because it determines nutrient availability. A soil test should be conducted with your local extension service to determine the pH and recommended fertilization approach for your soil.

Soil test results contain liming and fertilizer recommendations. Although not typically included in a basic soil test, nitrogen will always be included in the fertilization recommendations.

- > Nitrogen easily leaches from the soil (does not persist in the soil) and is a limiting factor in plant growth.
- > Phosphorus, on the other hand, binds tightly to soil particles (is less prone to leaching), but overapplication of phosphorus can exceed the soil's ability to retain it.

Overfertilizing or improper application practices can result in nitrogen and phosphorus contaminating local water sources, causing downstream problems such as algal blooms and problems for aquatic organisms, not to mention a waste of money and resources.

By having your soil tested and following the fertilizer recommendations based on what your soil actually needs, rather than applying just any fertilizer and at any rate, it will limit the risk of overfertilizing and/or leaching. Soil tests may also reveal deficiencies of other nutrients that aren't typical ingredients of fertilizers (such as magnesium) and may need to be supplemented. A soil test is essentially like getting a "check-up" for the landscape - it reveals important subterranean insights that help you make smarter choices for caring for the plants.

Trees seldom need to be fertilized unless a specific nutrient deficiency needs to be supplemented in the soil. Limiting excessive fertilizer applications around trees is ideal. Trees would benefit more from organic fertilizers that release nutrients at a slower rate or, better yet, from regular applications of compost (or just leaving organic matter such as leaf litter on the soil to decompose) that will increase nutrient availability in the soil over the long run.

For more information on composting and mulching, refer to the UGA Extension Publication *Composting and Mulching: A Guide to Managing Organic Landscape Refuse*. Also refer to the UGA Extension publication *How to Convert an Inorganic Fertilizer Recommendation to an Organic One* if you plan on using organic fertilizers for a soil test's fertilizer recommendation. Leave lawn clippings in place as another simple nutrient-enhancing practice. As clippings decompose, they slowly release nutrients back into the soil. Lastly, the tradeoff of less emphasis on fast grass growth via excessive fertilizer use means less mechanical maintenance (mowing and weed eating).

Soil complexity and plant roots

Soils differ in composition, texture, nutrient levels, acidity, and pore sizes. These variations influence how organisms grow in certain soils and how water behaves on, and within, the soil. Soil acidity and nutrient levels can be detected, measured, and oftentimes corrected with fertilizers or supplements to better support plant growth. However, soil composition, texture, and pore sizes are a little trickier to determine, and the concepts can become quite technical. Nevertheless, there are benefits to having a general idea of how soil is constructed.

Pore space is an important part of the soil. Ideally, 50% of the soil should be pore space, 25% of which is for air and 25% for water. This balance would ensure that plant roots can obtain water and oxygen, as both are essential for plant survival. Soil composition and texture have an impact on pore size, which will affect how well water infiltrates the soil and the soil's water holding capacity. A

common malpractice in lawn maintenance is watering landscape too frequently. A lawn that is too wet leads to too many pores being filled with water, which hinders the amount of available oxygen in the soil for plant roots. Plants essentially “breathe” through their root systems. Too much water and not enough air in the soil can also lead to the growth of harmful microbes that cause root rot and fungal issues. Allow the soil to dry between waterings (more on this later).

Soil compaction is a critical factor in tree and grass management. Compaction can occur when the soil is compressed during construction, vehicle traffic, and even foot traffic. Compacting the soil reduces the space of soil pores, leaving limited sized pockets of water and oxygen for plant roots. This is particularly bad news for trees, as their roots have a high oxygen demand. Turf can oftentimes fare better in compacted soils and will help with erosion control after new construction. Compacted soils can be improved over time by adding organic material to help improve the soil’s structure, or by aerating the soil. It should be noted that while turf aeration will benefit your grass, it does little, to nothing, to help trees that have been affected by compacted soils. Soil remediation techniques and treatments that can help

established trees recover do exist, but these can be quite costly and labor intensive. The best cure is prevention - avoid compaction as much as possible. If faced with compacted soil, grass may have an easier time growing than trees, especially if you can aerate the top few inches of soil. However, planting young, hardy tree species will also help correct compacted soil over time, with their extensive root systems.

The soil is alive! Beneficial microorganisms live in soils and contribute to nutrient availability for plant roots. Destroying or compressing soil pores or keeping soil too wet or too dry negatively impacts these important microbes, and in turn, harms plants.

Finally, the soil is where plant roots live and compete for resources, such as water, oxygen, nutrients, and space. We have already discussed nutrients, and we will discuss proper watering techniques in the next section. Tree roots may or may not grow deeper than grass roots in some cases, but tree roots do take up substantially more volume

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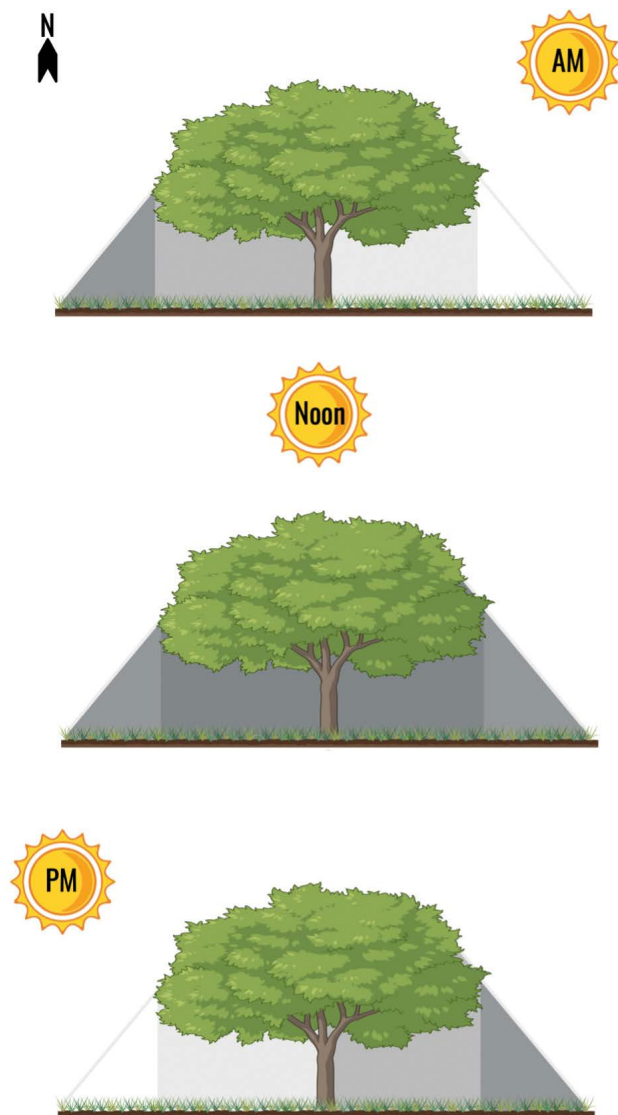


Illustration that shows the variation in the sun's movement throughout the day, and how this causes patterns of shade to vary. Created in BioRender. Deeb, T. (2025) <https://BioRender.com/436s93h>

(space) in the soil and have higher oxygen demands. There will always be competition occurring in the soil, but in most cases, a balance can be achieved.

Although “balance” may be achievable, competition should be reduced whenever possible. When grass won't grow around trees, prioritize the space for one or the other. Mulch the area around a tree's base instead of trying to grow grass directly beneath the canopy. Grow grass instead of trees in areas limited for space or have otherwise not-ideal conditions for trees to grow. Consider the mature size, nutritional requirements, and watering needs of the plant species you'd like to grow and compare those needs to the pre-existing conditions of the site being planted.

Proper use of irrigation

Established trees typically need about one to two inches of water each week. When done properly, irrigation helps supplement water requirements when rainfall is low or nonexistent. Frequent, shallow watering - such as with a lawn sprinkler - is not sufficient for trees (and most other plants), as it fails to deliver water deep enough into the soil for optimal uptake by tree roots. Shallow watering can also increase the volume of shallow roots produced by your trees and grass, which can make plants more susceptible to drought, increase supplemental watering needs, and increase competition for resources within the soil. Deep watering would encourage plants to extend their roots deeper. Watering too often is not beneficial because the soil needs time to dry out. Allowing soil to dry-out permits oxygen to reoccupy some of the soil's pore space, allowing for healthy plant root growth and beneficial microbial growth within the soil.

Although there is no one-size-fits-all or specific formula for watering recommendations, know that deep, infrequent watering that supplements rainfall keeps your trees (and turf) appropriately watered. To apply this rule, it is important to be aware of how water behaves on the property.

1. Place a shallow can (a tuna can works well), or some other container that is approximately one to two inches deep, in your yard. Stage the container within proximity of a sprinkler head, or just beneath a soaker hose or drip line. Turn on your irrigation and let it run for 10 minutes.
2. After 10 minutes, go outside and take note of any areas showing standing water or runoff. Allow some additional time for the water to soak into the soil.
3. Turn the water on for another 10 minutes.
4. Again, go outside and observe where water is taking longer to infiltrate, or where it may be running off.
5. If you do not notice any puddling or runoff, continue this experiment in 10-minute increments until you fill the can.
6. Record the number of intervals it took to fill the can.

Alternating between watering and resting intervals allows water to soak into the soil and is the best practice for preventing water waste and ensuring that your soil has been adequately watered. For large yards with multiple sections, you can alternate zones to allow each area time to absorb the water. If water infiltrates slowly, emphasize longer breaks between irrigation cycles. If the soil takes in water easily, you can increase the watering periods.

The overall goal of a good watering regimen for trees is to create a system that supplements rainfall (or achieves a goal of one to two inches of water per week) and allows

for water to infiltrate into the soil. This system encourages deeper rooting for all landscape plants, including grass. Over time, it minimizes long-term watering needs and alleviates drought effects.

Choose an irrigation system that best meets your tree's watering needs. When possible, use soaker hoses or drip irrigation for supplementally watering trees. If your landscape design includes mulched areas beneath the trees instead of grass, keep in mind that mature trees do not need regular supplemental watering - except during periods of drought. In contrast, young trees will need to be watered regularly until they become established. To optimize water infiltration and decrease water loss through evaporation, water between 10:00pm and 6:00am, especially in hot climates like Georgia.

For more information on watering trees and lawns, check out UGA's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources publication *Watering Trees* (Coder, 2022) and UGA Extension's publication *Irrigation for Lawns and Gardens* (Porter & Harrison, 2017).

The sunlight (and shade) problem

The most obvious dilemma for growing grass around trees pertains to the availability of sunlight. Grass needs sunlight, and trees provide shade. Shade occurs when light is partially blocked or filtered. Shade varies beneath different trees, and shade is not uniform spatially or temporally. Inconsistent exposure to sunlight can make it difficult for grass to grow well. The best solution is to not grow grass in areas directly beneath the canopies of trees or where the tree consistently casts shade. These areas can instead be mulched or planted with shade-loving plants (but not excessively - as to not defeat the purpose of limiting competition). Grass can be planted just beyond the perimeter of these mulched or landscaped areas where the sunlight is more consistent.

Proper plant species selection lessens problems related to access to sunlight and exposure to shade. When selecting grass to plant near trees, consider the sunlight requirements and shade tolerance of the species. Anticipate both the canopy density and the mature canopy dimensions of each tree species that you would like to plant in a lawn - keeping in mind that their impact on sunlight availability will change as the tree grows and shifts with the seasons. Also consider the sun's movement throughout the day, as this causes patterns of shade to vary. Doing research upfront will save you hassle down the road - whether you are planning new planting or reorganizing and prioritizing your existing landscape. Some handy tools for this are Lumos: Sun and Moon Tracker app and the Sun Seeker app.



Lion tailed trees – a practice which leads to weakened tree architecture. The circled areas show where a large section of the inner canopy has been cleared out of each tree, leaving the weight of the branches on the very tips, and making the trees more susceptible to winds that can cause branch failures.

Because we don't always have a blank canvas to work with, we must understand how to care for mature, established trees in established lawns about "the sunlight problem" as well. One common way that property owners try to incorporate more sunlight beneath their trees is to thin a tree's crown. This pruning method can sometimes be effective in allowing more sunlight through the canopy to reach the grass. However, it should be done in a way that does not compromise the health and structure of the tree.

Proper pruning requires the correct pruning dose – the amount of leaves (live canopy) removed. Harmful thinning takes out too many branches and their leaves - depleting the tree from its chlorophyll source. Clearing out the small branches and dense foliage from the inner canopy may allow sunlight through the middle of the tree but remember that shade is not uniform. Shade patterns change throughout the day based on the sun's position, which impacts turf. In addition, even well-intentioned crown thinning can incur some risk to the tree's structural integrity.

When you remove a tree's interior canopy, the proportion of the foliage and fine branch remaining is located along the outer edges of the canopy, which leaves too much weight at the branch tips. Each remaining branch is left unbalanced and structurally top-heavy, increasing the tension placed on each branch's attachment to the tree's trunk. Further, an open canopy allows strong winds to penetrate and strain each primary (scaffold) branch as an individual entity separate from its neighboring branches. Overly thinning a tree makes it more susceptible to experiencing branch breakages and failures.



This tree exhibits several poor pruning practices: it has been lion-tailed, excessively thinned, and previously topped. In response to the stress, the tree is producing heavy sucker growth in the upper canopy where branches were topped.

Crown raising is another common pruning method used in tree pruning to try and provide more sunlight for lawns. Crown raising involves the systematic removal of the canopy's lowest branches until a desired clearance height has been reached. Pruning the bottom branches can allow some light beneath the crown, but crown raising practices can also impact a tree's structural integrity if performed in excess. Like a 'lions tailed' scaffold branch, an excessively raised crown reduces a tree's low center of gravity and makes the entire tree's structure more easily influenced by strong winds. Also, removing a mature tree's large diameter branches in this effort will produce large wounds that the tree must now allocate resources so that the tissues compartmentalize (seal up) around the wound. The process of compartmentalization requires a great deal of energy. Consequently, a tree's health and vigor can be compromised by large pruning cuts that the tree must compartmentalize. Additionally, wounds from unnecessarily large pruning cuts can become entry points for harmful pests and pathogens.

When a large percentage of a tree's canopy is removed, a tree will first respond by compensating for the recent loss of its energy collectors (leaves). The tree does this by producing suckers (also called adventitious shoots or epicormic sprouts). Suckers are not true branches and possess weak attachments to the trunk or large branches. The tree produces suckers, to both quickly refill the space in its canopy and to absorb additional energy to compartmentalize each, adjacent pruning wound. Many arborists associate sucker production with stress.

To reiterate, improper pruning practices - such as completely stripping a tree's interior canopy (also called 'lion tailing'), repeatedly raising a tree's crown, or removing too-large diameter branches - can seriously compromise a tree's health and structural integrity. If pruning to increase sunlight for the lawn, always hire an ISA-Certified Arborist to thin a tree crown so the thinning benefits the grass without harming the tree.

Instead of spending thousands of dollars on pruning trees to try and grow grass directly beneath them, you might also just choose either trees or lawn space in certain areas. Mulched rings around the trees or landscaped areas containing shade-loving plants, surrounded by a happy lawn, can make for beautiful curb appeal with less headache, maintenance, and competition for resources. Mulch rings should be large enough to offer a barrier of protection from mechanical damage for the trunk and root flare. For optimal access to nutrients and less competition, mulched areas should ideally encompass the area underneath the drip zone of the tree's canopy. Inadequately small or overcrowded mulched areas can counteract the benefits of a mulched buffer zone.

Turfgrass species recommendations

The most important species' traits to consider when growing grass around or amongst trees is their shade tolerance and sunlight requirements. Additionally, Georgia's diverse geographical regions dictate the variety of recommended grass species for Georgia lawns. For the cooler, northern and mountainous regions of Georgia, tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass are options. Both grasses have a good tolerance for sun and shade and should do well in shaded areas (under trees).

Grass species recommendations get a little trickier in the warmer areas of central and Southern Georgia. Bermudagrass is the most popular turfgrass recommended (and required by many Homeowners Associations) that is used in these regions. The biggest drawback to bermudagrass, concerning the sunlight problem, is that it requires full sun and will not tolerate shade. Shade tolerant bermudagrass hybrids do exist, but for the most part this grass species does not grow well in the shade. If bermudagrass is your only option, you should create tree rings to decrease the area of unhealthy turf and increase the well-being of the trees. If you have a newer landscape without mature trees, it would be important to plant tree species that do not have widespread or dense canopies.

Other warmer region (warm-season) grass recommendations are zoysiagrass, St. Augustinegrass, and centipedegrass. These three grass species have good to fair shade-tolerance. Zoysiagrass and St.

Augustinegrass are more shade-persistent than centipedegrass. Of these two options, zoysiagrass is the most shade tolerant and best warm-season grass to grow beneath mature trees. For more information on selecting the best grass, see the UGA Extension's publication *Lawns in Georgia: Selection and Species*.

Tree species recommendations

Proper tree species selection is crucial with newer landscapes or when planting a new tree in an established lawn. Mature tree canopy spread, and foliar density are the two most important factors to consider regarding the success of the tree and future maintenance of your turf. First, be aware that tree crowns have different shapes. Some tree species have narrow, conical (cone-shaped) crowns, as opposed to a broad, widespread canopy. A tall, narrow canopy equates with a smaller footprint of shade within your yard; some species that naturally exhibit this conical growth habit include tulip poplar, bald cypress, pond cypress, dawn redwood, European hornbeam, English oak, and Eastern red cedar. Also consider columnar cultivars of naturally not-fastigate (upright growth) tree species; you may inquire about these cultivars at your local nursery.

Some tree species do not possess dense canopies that create dense shade beneath their driplines. Instead, these tree species possess open canopies comprised of pinnately structured ("feathery") leaves or a more open (less-dense) canopy that allow dappled sunlight beneath their crowns. Some tree species that exhibit this include elm species, American hophornbeam, hornbeam, Ginkgo, river birch, American sycamore, Kentucky coffeetree, honey locust, willows, and pecan. Tree species with dense and widespread canopies should be avoided for new tree plantings in a lawn space, unless mulched areas are designated. For additional tree species recommendations, contact your local nursery, a trusted arborist, or check out the UGA Extension Publication, *Native Plants of Georgia*. Keep in mind the significance of mature, established trees and do your best to preserve them when redesigning a landscape or maintaining an established lawn. 

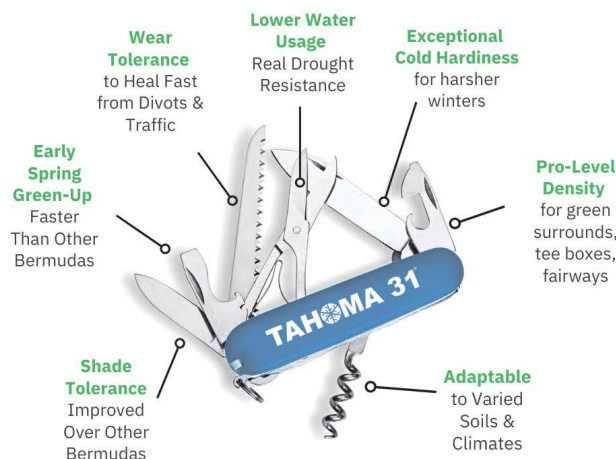


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When growth breaks your brand

The hidden risk of outgrowing your identity

By Kriston Sellier, President of id8



MANY LANDSCAPING COMPANIES do not stall because demand disappears. Growth slows when the business evolves faster than the brand. A company that began as a small local operation may now manage multiple crews, commercial contracts, and specialized services such as irrigation, lighting, or design-build. Some expand into new markets. Others acquire smaller operators as part of a regional growth strategy.

The business changes. The brand often does not.

This disconnect is what we call the brand evolution gap.

A brand evolution gap occurs when your company's capabilities and market position move forward while the brand still reflects an earlier stage of the business.

Customers, employees, and partners struggle to understand what your company stands for. The market receives mixed signals about who you are and what you do best.

When landscaping companies are most at risk

This type of disconnect most often appears during periods of growth or strategic transition. Those moments are common in the landscaping industry and typically occur when a business moves from one stage of development to another.

Examples include:

- > Moving from residential maintenance into commercial property contracts
- > Expanding from basic maintenance into services such as irrigation, lighting, hardscapes, or design-build
- > Growing from an owner-operator model into a multi-crew organization with account managers and sales staff
- > Expanding into additional markets or service areas
- > Acquiring smaller operators as part of a regional growth strategy

Each milestone represents meaningful progress. Each also increases the likelihood that the market still views the company through the lens of its earlier stage.

Without deliberate attention, perception begins to lag behind reality.

Warning signs your brand has fallen behind

How can you tell when your brand no longer reflects the business you have built? The signals often appear in everyday interactions.

Examples include:

- > Trucks that advertise residential mowing even though most revenue now comes from commercial contracts
- > Sales representatives describing the company differently depending on who is presenting
- > New employees struggling to explain what makes the company different from competitors
- > Customers assuming the company provides maintenance only, despite expanded services such as design-build
- > A website that highlights outdated projects rather than the work you want to win today

Individually, these issues may seem minor. Taken together, they signal that the market is still seeing an earlier version of your company.

What are the risks?

The consequences of a brand disconnect rarely appear overnight. The impact usually develops gradually as the market struggles to understand where your company fits.

Clients reviewing proposals may underestimate the scale or sophistication of your services. Prospective customers may overlook capabilities you now offer because they are not clearly communicated. Internally, sales conversations may vary widely because no clear positioning guides the message.

In competitive bidding environments, perception matters. Property managers and decision-makers often rely on quick signals such as brand presentation, project portfolio, and company positioning when deciding which contractors make the shortlist.

When this happens, the market fills in the gaps on its own. The perception that forms may no longer reflect the business you have built.

How to close the brand evolution gap

Closing the gap requires more than updating a logo or redesigning a website. The objective is to align how the market sees your company with the business you are building.

1. START WITH A BRAND AUDIT.

Evaluate how your brand appears across trucks, uniforms, proposals, recruiting materials, and your website. Gather feedback from customers, property managers, employees, and prospects. These conversations often reveal where the brand and the business have drifted apart.

2. DEFINE YOUR POSITIONING.

Clarify what you want your company to be known for going forward. The focus may be commercial property maintenance, HOA management, or design-build expertise. Clear positioning helps your team communicate a consistent message about why clients should choose you.

3. ALIGN YOUR TEAM.

Employees should understand the company's direction and value proposition. Consistency across sales staff, managers, and crews strengthens the signal your brand sends to the market.

4. RELAUNCH WITH INTENTION.

Update your website, project portfolio, marketing materials, and customer communications to accurately represent the work you want to win in the future.

5. KEEP YOUR BRAND MOVING FORWARD.

Growth inevitably changes a landscaping business. Services expand. Clients evolve. Projects increase in scale and complexity.

Your brand should evolve alongside those changes.

A brand that reflects the current state of the business clarifies what your company does best and strengthens credibility with customers, employees, and partners. A brand that remains stuck in the past creates confusion and slows momentum.

Evaluating your brand is not simply a marketing exercise. It is a business decision that influences the contracts you win, the employees you attract, and how the market understands your company.

A clear and current brand ensures that the company you have become is the company the market actually sees. 



About the author

Kriston Sellier is a mid-market branding expert and founder / president of id8 (www.id8agency.com), an award-winning branding agency that helps organizations solve complex challenges through strategic, research-driven creative.

Invasive two-spot cotton leafhopper

Biology and management in ornamentals

By Sabrina Attia and Shimat V. Joseph, Department of Entomology, University of Georgia

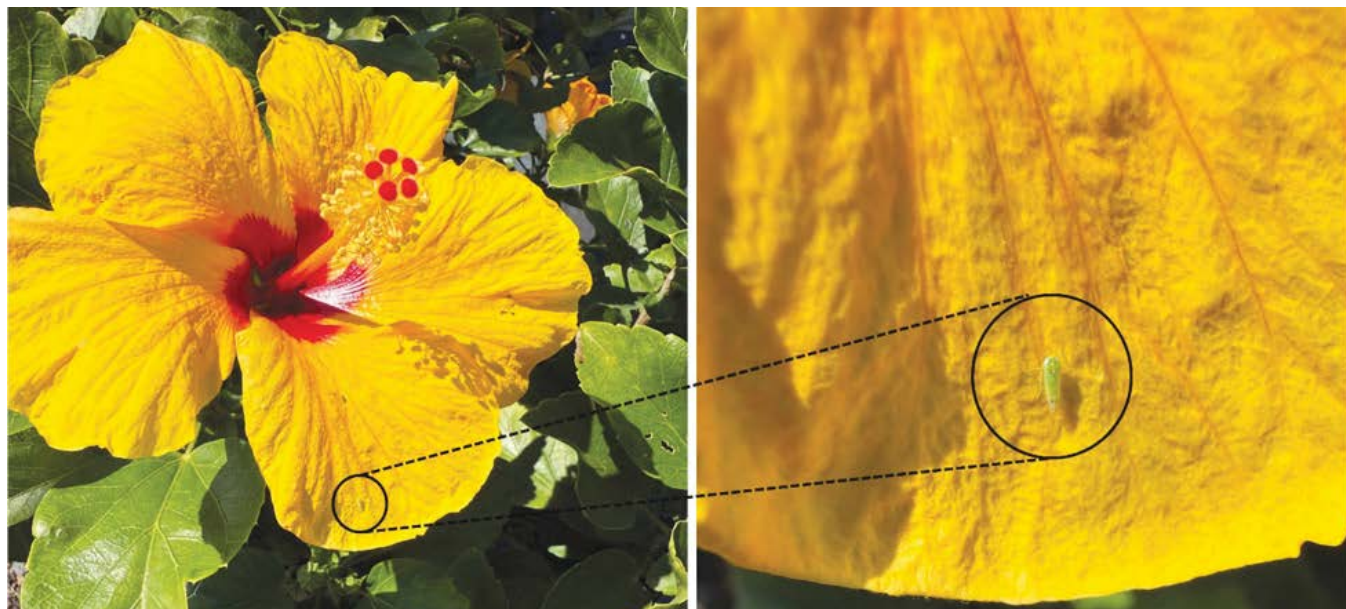


Figure 1. The two-spot cotton leafhopper (*Amrasca biguttula*) on a hibiscus flower. Photo Credit: Shimat V. Joseph, UGA

THE TWO-SPOT COTTON LEAFHOPPER (*Amrasca biguttula*), an invasive pest native to the Indian subcontinent, has recently expanded into the southeastern United States (Figures 1 and 2). After initial detections in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico in 2023, the pest was reported in Florida in 2024 and in Georgia in 2025.

Now, it is confirmed across more than 100 counties in seven southeastern states. Its rapid spread reflects the ecological adaptability typical of invasive insects and raises concerns for Georgia's high value ornamental industry, especially hibiscus.

Biology

The two-spot cotton leafhopper has three main life stages: eggs, nymphs, and adults (Figure 2). Females lay approximately 15–21 eggs, which are inserted within the midrib and sometimes along the veins of the leaves. Within 20 days, eggs hatch at moderate temperatures (approximately 77–86 °F), although it may take longer at cooler temperatures. After hatching, first instars begin feeding immediately on the host plant.

The nymphal stage consists of five instars and typically lasts about 20 days, depending on temperature and host plant conditions. Newly emerged nymphs are small, pale, and highly active (Figure 2A). As they develop, they gradually become greenish and resemble miniature adults, although they lack fully developed wings. Nymphs undergo successive molts between each instar, shedding their exoskeleton (skin) to grow, with each molt generally occurring every 1–2 days under favorable conditions (around 77–86 °F). Both nymphs and adults possess piercing-sucking mouthparts and feed on plant sap, primarily from vascular tissues, which may cause leaf curling, yellowing, and reduced plant vigor.

Adults are small, wedge-shaped insects and are easily identified by two characteristic dark spots on their forewings (Figure 2). Under optimal environmental conditions, the entire life cycle can be completed within approximately 2–3 weeks, allowing multiple overlapping generations to develop during the growing season.

Damage

Both nymphs and adults feed using piercing-sucking mouthparts that disrupt leaf cells, causing marginal chlorosis (Figure 3A-E), leaf curling and cupping (Figure

3E), necrotic patches, and the characteristic hopper burn symptoms (Figure 3F). Feeding reduces photosynthesis and overall plant vigor. In ornamentals, even moderate injury can render plants unmarketable. Infested hibiscus plants have been documented in retail centers across Florida, Louisiana, and Texas, suggesting spread through plant movement. Unlike many leafhopper species, the two-spot cotton leafhopper is not known to transmit viral or mycoplasma diseases. Economic losses stem primarily from direct feeding injury, although the full impact on ornamental crops in the U.S. remains under investigation.

Host range

Although the two-spot cotton leafhopper can be polyphagous, feeding on more than 25 plant species globally (including cotton, okra, eggplant, and sunflower), Hibiscus species, such as *H. syriacus*, *H. rosa-sinensis*, and many hybrids in Georgia, have been identified as particularly susceptible and require careful monitoring. Thus, malvaceous ornamental plants are particularly vulnerable to direct feeding damage. Plants in the Solanaceae, Asteraceae, and Cucurbitaceae should be closely monitored for signs of infestation.



Figure 2. Different stages of leafhopper nymphs on okra plants (above) and an adult (below). Photos: Shimat V. Joseph



Figure 3. Two-spot cotton leafhopper damage on (A-B) *Hibiscus syriacus* plants, (C-D) *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis* in a wholesale nursery, and (E-F) *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis* in a greenhouse. Red arrows indicate the development of yellowing from the leaf margins, and blue arrows indicate leaf curl. Figures F show necrosis on leaves, referred to as “hopper burn.”

Photo credits: (A-D) Shimat V. Joseph and (E and F) Sabine Attia, University of Georgia.

Monitoring

Effective management of the two-spot cotton leafhopper requires consistent and systematic scouting, particularly during warm months when populations increase rapidly. Growers should closely inspect young foliage and the undersides of leaves, where both nymphs and adults commonly aggregate. Early signs of hopper burn, characterized by marginal chlorosis and subtle leaf cupping, should be monitored carefully, as these symptoms often precede visible population outbreaks.

Yellow sticky cards placed in nursery blocks provide an additional tool for detecting adult activity and identifying new introductions (Figure 4). A sticky card can be placed in a 1,000-square-foot area. To prevent accidental spread through plant movement, incoming hibiscus and other Malvaceae ornamentals should be quarantined for 7–10 days and examined for hidden eggs or early instars. The beat sheet method can be used by gently shaking the plants with a wooden stick to dislodge leafhoppers onto a fabric sheet placed underneath the selected plants (Figure 5). Because ornamental crops must meet strict aesthetic standards, even low pest densities can compromise marketability; therefore, any detectable population warrants immediate intervention.

Management

Cultural control

Cultural practices form the first line of defense against two-spot cotton leafhopper infestations. Regular removal of heavily infested leaves or entire plants can significantly reduce local populations and prevent rapid spread within nursery blocks. Spatial separation of highly susceptible species, such as *Hibiscus* spp., from areas with known infestations can further limit colonization and reduce the risk of severe damage.



Figure 4. A yellow sticky card was placed on an ornamental nursery plant to monitor the adult two-spot cotton leafhopper. Photo credit: Christopher Hardin, University of Georgia.

Sanitation and exclusion

Preventing the introduction of the two-spot cotton leafhopper into clean nursery areas is essential. Purchase plants from licensed nurseries that follow best management practices.

Newly arrived plants should be quarantined and carefully inspected for adults or nymphs before being integrated into production blocks. Do not mix with potential hosts, such as other hibiscus species, in the nursery.

Where feasible, the use of insect-screened structures or greenhouses can provide an additional barrier, particularly for high-value ornamentals or during peak leafhopper activity periods. Plants may come in clean, but eggs hatch ~7 d; thus, isolating the screened area is advised. The use of an effective insecticide (suggestions below) a day or two after arrival at the new facility is advised, as it can kill hatching nymphs on newly introduced plants.

Biological control

Natural enemies can play an important role in suppressing two-spot cotton leafhopper populations, especially in outdoor or minimally managed nursery settings. Generalist predators such as lady beetles (*Coccinellidae*), lacewings (*Chrysopidae*), and predatory mirids (*Miridae*) may reduce nymph and adult densities, limiting feeding damage. Conserving these beneficial insects by minimizing broad-spectrum insecticide use and providing habitat refuges can enhance the efficacy of biological control.



Chemical control

When cultural and biological approaches are insufficient, the use of insecticides may be necessary. Systemic insecticides, such as imidacloprid, thiamethoxam, acetamiprid, or spirotetramat are effective against *A. biguttula* and can provide extended protection, particularly for immatures hidden within leaves. Contact insecticides like bifenthrin or lambda-cyhalothrin provide rapid knockdown but may require repeated applications and carry a higher risk of resistance. Less toxic options, including azadirachtin, horticultural oils, soaps, or spinosyns, are suitable for early infestations or for plants sensitive to phytotoxicity, especially in retail or display settings. Regardless of product choice, rotating modes of action is essential to prevent the development of resistance, and all applications should strictly adhere to label recommendations regarding dosage, pollinator safety, and potential phytotoxicity. Other effective insecticides include flupyradifluon (Altus), tolfenpyrad (Hatchi-Hatchi), isocycloseram (Vykenda), flonicamid (Aria), and sulfoxaflor + spinetoram (XXpire). Insect growth regulators, buprofezin (Talus), and novaluron (Pedestal) are also effective against the adult and nymphal stages of the two-spot cotton leafhopper. 



Figure 5. Beat sheet method can be used where the plants are gently struck with a wooden stick to dislodge the leafhoppers to a sheet placed underneath the selected plants.

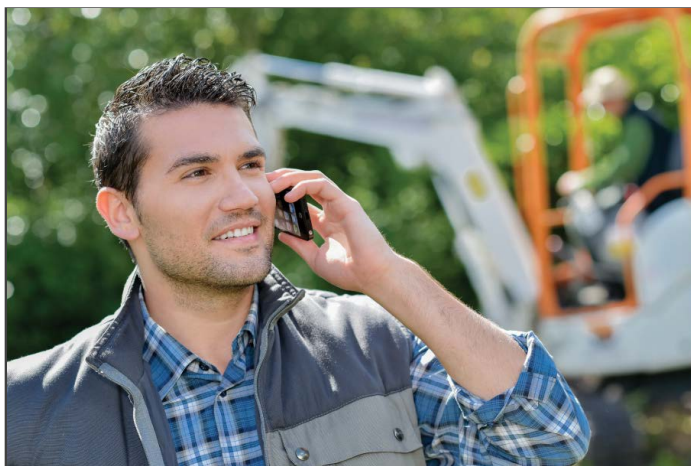
Photo credit: <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/video/using-beat-sheet>



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- Leads disappear into thin air

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TRIMAX **OPTIADJUST**

WHY SMARTER HEIGHT ADJUSTMENT MATTERS IN PROFESSIONAL MOWING.

In professional mowing, cutting height is not a one-time setup decision. It is something that often needs to change as conditions change, sometimes from site to site, sometimes within the same day.

Growth rates shift with temperature and rainfall. Turf density can vary across a property or from location to location. Presentation standards may differ between a sports field, a park, and a roadside contract. For operators managing multiple sites or large areas, the need to adapt is simply part of the job.

The problem is that traditional deck adjustments are rarely quick. In many cases, changing height means stopping the tractor, climbing down, manually adjusting the mower decks, and then getting back underway. It may not seem significant in isolation but repeated several times over a day; those interruptions add up. They break workflow, slow productivity, and introduce more opportunities for inconsistency.



Using the intuitive Trimax Connect app, height changes can be made in seconds from the seat of the cab.

That is why a system like the Trimax OptiAdjust is worth paying attention to—not because it changes the fundamentals of mowing, but because it addresses one of the small, recurring friction points that operators deal with every day.

Available on the Pegasus S5, OptiAdjust allows cutting height changes to be made from the tractor cab through the Trimax Connect app, using a Bluetooth connection between the mower and a compatible mobile device. In simple terms, it gives operators a faster way to respond to changing conditions without stopping to make manual adjustments at the deck.

The real value of that capability is not just convenience. It is operational consistency.

Cutting height plays a major role in the final presentation of turf. When adjustments are easy to make, operators are more likely to respond when conditions call for it, rather than pushing on with a setting that is close enough. Over time, that can help improve the uniformity of the finish across varied ground and changing turf conditions.

There is also a turf management benefit. During periods of rapid growth, smaller and more frequent height adjustments can be preferable to larger corrections made too late. A more responsive approach can help reduce plant stress and support better surface quality over time. For managers responsible for sports fields, parks, reserves, and other high-visibility turf areas, that kind of control can have practical long-term value.

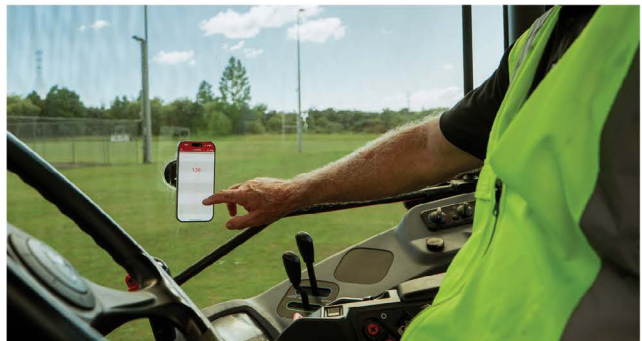
Just as importantly, repeatability matters. Manual adjustment always leaves room for variation, especially across busy crews or demanding schedules. A system designed to support more accurate and repeatable height changes can help reduce errors and make it easier to achieve a consistent standard, regardless of who is operating the machine.

That consistency also applies to the process itself. With both height adjustment and calibration handled through the app, crews can make changes more smoothly in the field and with less disruption to the job.

Built on the Pegasus S5 platform, it adds in-cab cutting height control to a mower already established in large-area professional mowing. Rather than redefining the job, it improves one of the routine tasks within it.

And that may be the most useful way to think about technology like this. In professional turf care, productivity is rarely won through one dramatic change. More often, it comes from removing small inefficiencies, improving repeatability, and making it easier for operators to maintain standards across a long working day.

In that context, in-cab height adjustment is not just a feature. It is a practical response to the realities of modern mowing.



Learn More About OptiAdjust

Trimax OptiAdjust is designed for professional operators seeking greater efficiency and consistency through in-cab cutting height adjustment.

To learn more about OptiAdjust, discuss suitability for your operation, or arrange a demonstration, contact your local Trimax representative.

Visit the Trimax website for more information.



TRIMAXMOWERS.COM

JUN

16



Latino Landscape Contractor Summit

Gain business resources and hear stories of success

DATE: Tuesday, June 16
TIME: 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm
PLACE: Cultivation Brewery
 650 Langford Drive | Norcross, GA 30071

AUG

5



UGA Turfgrass Field Day and UAC Exhibitor Tradeshow

Get the latest research presented by experts in your field

DATE: Wednesday, August 5 (*Industry social and dinner Tuesday August 4*)
TIME: 8:00 am - 3:00 pm
PLACE: UGA Griffin Campus
 1109 Experiment Street | Griffin, GA 30223

AUG

25



UAC Networking and Education Dinner

Join us for networking, education, and dinner

DATE: Tuesday, August 25
TIME: 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm
PLACE: Buck Jones Nursery
 689 Grayson New Hope Road | Lawrenceville, GA 30045

AUG

28



UAC/UGA Landscape Training

Earn category 10, 21, or 24 pesticide credits, ISA credits

DATE: Friday, August 28
TIME: 8:00 am - 1:00 pm
PLACE: Houston County Extension Office
 60 Kings Chapel Road | Perry, GA 31069

SEP

29



UAC Networking and Education Dinner

Join us for networking, education, and dinner

DATE: Tuesday, September 29
TIME: 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm
PLACE: Pike Wholesale Nursery
 645 N Greenbriar Pkwy | Marietta, GA 30062

OCT

29



UAC Sporting Clays Tournament

Clay shoot | Win prizes | Eat BBQ

DATE: Thursday, October 29
TIME: 9:00 am - 1:00 pm
PLACE: Blalock Lakes | 4075 New Corinth Road | Newnan GA 30263



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Hydrangea paniculata 'SMNHPPH' PP#32,511; CBR#7268

Long Blooming | Vibrant color

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	4-6' tall + 4-5' wide	 

Landscapes love Limelight Prime® panicle hydrangea. It's been trialed and tested to ensure it has darker foliage, stronger stems, and a more upright, compact habit than 'Limelight.' Plus, its lime green blooms maintain their color longer until transitioning to a rich pink.



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