PlantHealthCare.com

FEBRUARY 2000 ONLINE MAGAZINE

Labor Shortage: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Helen Stone on Arbor Hack & Stacks

Stabilizing Ecosystems with VAM Fungi

NEW! Multi-Field Facilities Appeal to Fans

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE

Table of Contents

Contents

THIS WEEK'S FEATURE:

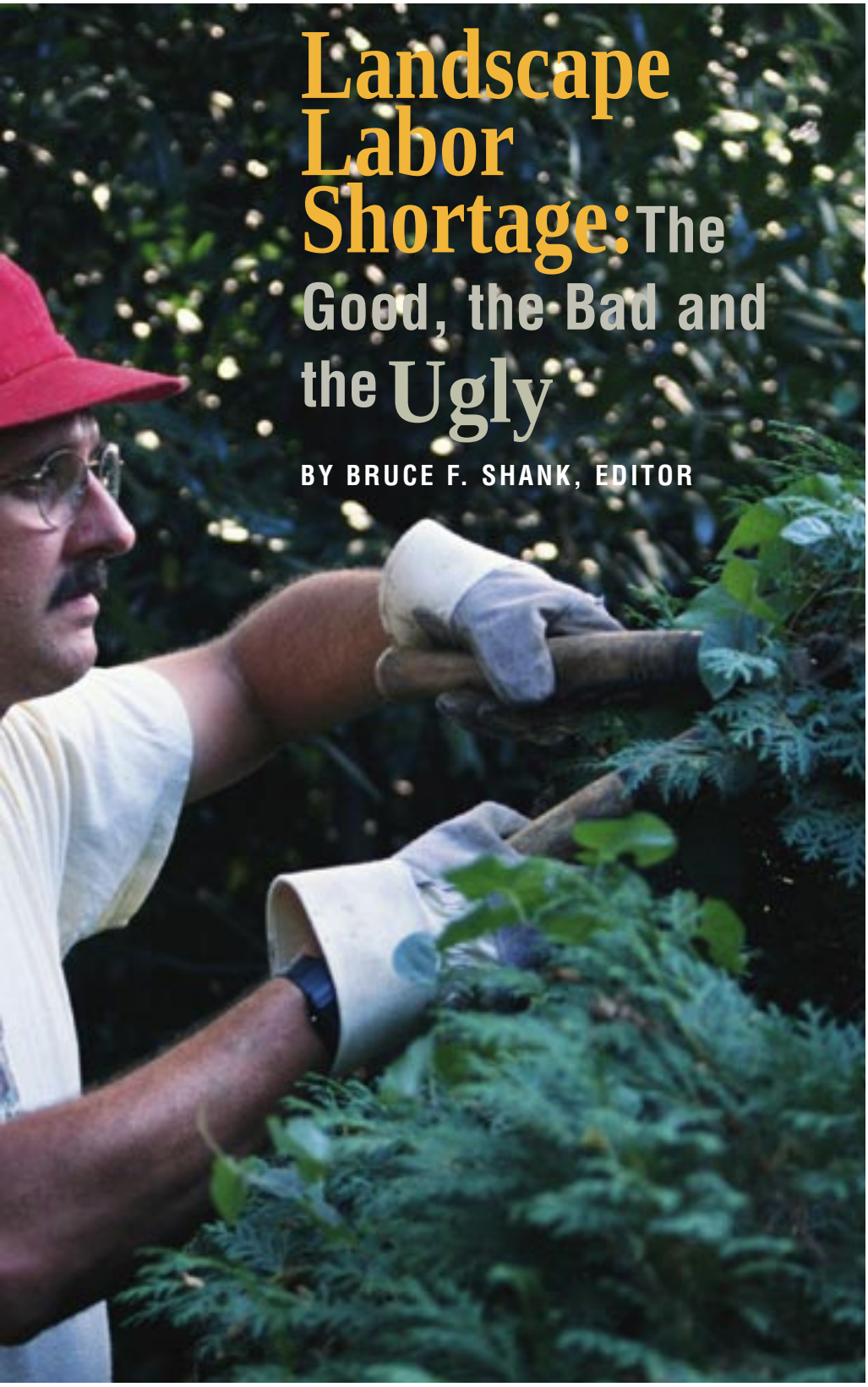
Multi-Field Facilities Appeal to Fans

OTHER FEBRUARY ARTICLES:

INTRODUCTION TO US

COLUMNS

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE



Landscape Labor Shortage: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

BY BRUCE F. SHANK, EDITOR

The landscape industry needs to look in the mirror. There is more work than landscapers can handle because the industry is labor intensive and the country, in a booming economy, is enjoying low unemployment. Existing educational programs to supply the industry with skilled professionals are few in number and often lack the industry support they deserve. Companies with good training programs often find their employees get hired away by their competitors. Recruitment efforts by both landscape companies and colleges with landscape programs are frequently unsophisticated. Much of it has to do with self image. That's why a mirror is needed.

Small businesses in general are struggling to meet their employee needs, according to the Small Business Administration. The SBA revealed in a 1999 survey that more than a third of businesses experienced labor shortages. In reaction, 20 percent of the respondents increased salaries and ten percent improved benefits. But, in many cases, that was not enough to meet labor needs in light of attrition and growth.

Each year, the landscape industry must recruit 150,000 individuals just to make up for attrition. The physical and often seasonal nature of the landscape industry

Labor Shortages CONTINUED

causes turnover rates of 20 percent and more per year. Workdays frequently begin at sunrise and don't end until sunset. When landscapers face tight job deadlines, weekend overtime is often the only solution, especially in the face of labor shortages.

Growth rates for the past two years have approached 20 percent in many areas. While productivity improvement with equipment and training can absorb some of the growth, landscape businesses still have a significant demand for skilled and unskilled workers. When attrition is added to growth, the industry must find approximately 300,000 new employees each year. That might not be possible without making changes in the way it recruits, trains, pays and insures the health and security of its workforce.

One landscape business owner complained that he is forced to tolerate some personal problems of his trained employees because he knows they can't be replaced. He also implied that the industry has a higher rate of substance abuse than others do. In effect, many of the people the industry currently employs aren't working up to their potential.

Unions representing laborers in some cities have been known to make it harder for landscape contractors to correct productivity robbing work habits of some union members. In some cases, unions can actually prevent business owners from rewarding their better employees or disciplining bad ones.

Productivity Is the Watchword

The financial world today is fast-paced and focused on the short-term. Stock prices are more important than dividends. Productivity is the weapon we have used to control inflation. Credit is the tool we have used to increase productivity by buying new technology. Technology has helped some industries more than others. Industries supplying technology to improve productivity are booming.

This boom is trickling down to service and construction industries, which are not as likely to experience a dramatic change in technological increases in productivity. The drama is in technology more than support industries. Furthermore, we do little to

Labor Shortages CONTINUED

promote the significance of landscapes in our society and the value of those who work with plants.

The landscape industry can only do so much to increase productivity in order to meet the growth generated by a strong economy. It is highly dependent upon people, admittedly a large portion of which do not need to be highly skilled. But the efficiency of the unskilled labor force depends greatly on knowledgeable managers who have both technical knowledge and management skills. So, in fact, the industry has a double challenge, one to meet its demand for relatively low-skilled laborers and, perhaps more importantly, to train and keep the managers that make labor productive.

A controversial, yet practical approach to solve labor shortages, when the country's unemployment rate is only four percent, is to hire immigrants with work visas. The U.S. Department of Labor's H2B Program allows employers to bring foreign workers into the country for up to ten months if they cannot find local workers to fill their seasonal needs. There are problems, such as reasonably priced housing and language barriers, but the immigrant has an obligation to the employer. Both the employer and the immigrant laborer must make commitments to the program for it to be approved by the Labor Certification Office at the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment Training Administration. Some companies specialize in handling the details of H2B employment. One such company is Amigos Labor Solutions in Dallas, TX, (214) 634-0500.

Management has a new challenge when hiring foreign speaking labor—communication. Not only do managers need to be technically skilled, good planners and delegators, and like working outside in all types of weather, they need to be proficient in Spanish. Clearly the value of management has gone up and salaries and benefits must follow accordingly. Managers should not be forced to apply for unemployment despite the seasonal nature of landscaping. They should be year-round employees with full benefits who are encouraged to seek training to stay current.

Management training can take all kinds of directions. Proficiency with employees is essential. Working with customers is a skill that can benefit from training. Planning

Labor Shortages CONTINUED

budgets and scheduling are subjects always worth refreshing. These topics are timeless, whereas technology changes. Pesticide certification and licensing, water use management, new technologies in nutrition and plant health, and new computer and communication equipment can be taught to key managers during the off season. All contribute to greater productivity during the busy season.

Look to all possible sources for training. Contact industry associations, your local distributors, county extension, state Land Grant University for both departments of horticulture and business, and training consultants. Often classes can be arranged in your area or just for your company staff. The cost of this training should be part of the employee's benefit package. However, in areas where it is common for companies to steal the trained managers of their competitors, you might consider a contract that requires managers to work the entire next season or reimburse the company for half the cost of the training.

Encourage managers to become licensed in their specialty. Assist them in attending national conventions. Give them the time to participate in association functions. But, most importantly, make sure you stick to a schedule of regular review and discussion sessions one-on-one. Communicate clearly and compassionately while establishing rules and goals together. Review the company's performance with managers and ask for their ideas. Include them in major decisions.

Recruitment

Businesses help themselves by being visible in their community. They not only gain customers, they also gain recognition, which attracts the attention of people thinking about careers. Work with local schools, extension programs, county fairs and churches. Contribute regularly to local newspapers and radio and television stations. When your employees do something newsworthy, prepare a news release and distribute it to the local media. The same is true for special jobs you install or maintain and awards your company wins. Run regular classified ads in trade magazines and association websites.

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE

Labor Shortages CONTINUED

Your vehicles are often the main thing on which people base their image of your company. Set a dress code and back it up with a uniform allowance. Uniforms can be both professional in appearance and functional. It should be something your managers are proud of when they walk into a restaurant at breakfast or lunch.

Advertise with class. Don't put prices in your ads. Stress quality, expertise (certification, association membership, awards), and reliability. Keep in touch with customers with a newsletter and an occasional phone call. Send out reminders for seasonal landscape phenomena, such as color changes, irrigation scheduling, pruning, fertilization and pest control. Today it's smart to have an e-mail address with which customers can reach you. A website with some of the same information in your newsletter is a good idea.

If you really want to impress customers, have your managers create plant inventories for major customers and send the customer a maintenance recommendation based on his exact landscape. That's when you should mention a price, one-on-one with your customer.

The landscape industry's labor and management problem is serious. To really build and protect an image of professionalism, one high school and college students want to pursue, it takes a whole package. The landscape market is one that is relatively easy to enter but difficult to stay in. If you don't want it enough to work hard and do it right, then you probably wouldn't have read this far. But since you have read this far, we want to help you find the employees you need. Your comments and suggestions are invited.

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE

Arbor Hack & Stacks

BY HELEN STONE, publisher,
Southwest Trees & Turf

Our trees are in trouble. Consider that the average urban tree lives about seven years, with park trees doing a little better. These are the same trees that live for centuries in "the wild" or in Europe. Each year, municipalities spend millions of dollars planting and caring for trees. Add in the private sector, and billions of dollars probably isn't too much of a stretch. So what's the problem?

Could ignorance be the cause? It shouldn't be. Research on urban trees has increased five-fold in the past ten years. True, as far as "ornamental" plants go, turfgrass still seems to capture the greatest percentage of research dollars, but due to the International Society of Arboriculture, the National Arborist Association, the American Nursery and Landscape Association and many regional funding groups, there is finally research available on woody ornamentals. Combine that with existing research performed for the forestry and agriculture industries, and you'll see that there is plenty of sound information out there.

What have we learned from the research? First of all, proper plant selection is crucial to success. Not only do we have to look at trees that are appropriate for our general geographic region, but we need to take microclimates into account.

(continued)

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE

Hack & Stacks CONTINUED

Sure, cottonwoods thrive in the Las Vegas Valley near the springs and washes, but they're a pretty lame choice for a water-conserving landscape. Palm trees grow just about anywhere in the Southwest, but does that mean they should be planted under power lines? And how many times have you seen a shade-loving understory plant burning up in reflected light and heat in a Southern exposure?

Now, I like landscape architects. For the most part, they're intelligent, creative people with a lot on the ball. But, I recently saw an article on the design process that stated that the first thing you need to consider is the aesthetics of a project—be sure that the plants fit the "theme" that is trying to be created. The second criteria was that the plants should be suited to the environment. Excuse me…don't you have that switched around, fella? You can create beautiful, aesthetic designs until Armageddon, but if the plants aren't suited to the environment, you've failed! That's right…you're a failure!

So, we've picked the right tree for the right place and find a nursery that will deliver it. Lo and behold, look at the roots! They're circling the pot! Well, we'll go ahead and plant it anyway…we're on a deadline and we're lucky to have found the trees in the first place. So the roots circle and circle and circle and eventually we have a nice rain, a strong wind and time to say bye, bye baby.

Think the roots look OK? Well, look again. Chances are if you check right near the trunk, you'll find them all kinked up. That's because circling roots can start when trees are in one-inch liners. Sure, it only takes a few seconds when they're being transplanted to prevent this problem, but time is money, right? Sure, growing containers are available that are research-proven to stop circling roots in their infancy, but they cost a few cents more than the old standbys. And besides, the end user rarely complains, anyway.

All right, we've actually found a tree with a healthy root system. Now it's time to plant it. Let's dig the hole nice and deep…stop! Researchers tell us over and over that one of the main causes of tree decline is because we bury them too deep. The "root flare" is probably a misnomer. This interface between the trunk and root is actually

(continued)

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE

Hack & Stacks CONTINUED

closer to trunk tissue than root tissue. This means that constant moisture (which comes from the soil) will eventually cause it to rot. You might as well just take a knife and girdle the tree! Yet over and over we see the "telephone pole" effect. If you don't see any root flare, I'll bet you 100 bucks that the tree's been planted to deep. I live in Las Vegas, and gambling is not my hobby…but I like a sure thing.

What about amendments? Well, the research says that in most cases, you don't need them. Trees do the same or better if the soil is amended or not. But then again, it's hard to find research that's been conducted on the scraped away, compacted sterile environment that passes for soil in most new developments.

Research has also shown that soils with a percentage of organic matter provide a much better growing environment than those that have none. A good soil is alive with bacteria, fungi and other organisms that help roots absorb water and nutrients—that's also been proven.

Now, you don't want to dig a hole, fill it with organics and let the tree drown in the "bath tub" you've created. But if you want to stack the odds in your favor, providing an organic boost can't hurt.

You can also help the root system by loosening up the soil that surrounds the planting hole. Research shows that the wider you excavate around (not under!) the root ball, the faster the tree will get established—"shallow and wide" are the latest tree-planting specifications. Save the organics you were going to incorporate into the hole and use them as mulch—but don't overdo it!

Mulch has been shown to provide a huge range of benefits—keeping soil evenly moist, regulating temperature, conserving water, and gradually increasing the organic percentage of the soil, to name a few. But how many times have you seen trees under a "burial mound." Remember the difference between root tissue and trunk tissue? Remember that constant moisture causes rot? By burying the root flare with mulch, you're basically accomplishing the same thing as planting too deep.

(continued)

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE

Hack & Stacks CONTINUED

Now it's time to tie up the tree so it won't go anywhere. Wire through a hose or plastic nursery tape work great, right? Wrong! A well-grown nursery specimen shouldn't need to be trussed up like a witch tied to a stake. Granted, sometimes, staking is necessary. Stake low, use a wide, soft strapping material and let the tree sway with the wind. And get those stakes off fast! I can't tell you how many otherwise-healthy trees I've seen that have been permanently mutilated because the ties were not removed.

In the Southwest, we have to irrigate almost everything for survival. So you have a tree that will potentially reach 40 or 50 feet high with an equal canopy and what do you see? One or two drip emitters that deliver a couple gallons an hour. The theory is that "someone" will come and add emitters some day. Yeah, right. It doesn't take that much more work or money to initially install the dozen or so emitters that research has shown is necessary for long-term tree health. Yet you rarely see trees with more than a couple of emitters.

If a tree has survived all the above, it's now ready for the ultimate indignity. Oh, my…it's "too big." No problem; just lop off the branches until it's the size you want. Even if it's not too big, you need to have your tree "done" (as I once heard a golf course superintendent say) once a year.

Every morning, I walk my dogs for about an hour. In the area surrounding my house that I can reach on my walk, I've seen every type of tree damage and destruction I could imagine, and some that I couldn't. What drives people to do this?

So-called "professionals" (they have a truck and a chipper) can be spotted cheerfully wielding chain saws and causing irrevocable harm all over the country at any given time. Research has shown, without the slightest doubt, that topping hurts trees. It causes internal decay and weak attachments, and severely shortens the life-span of any tree. Yet, it's still the preferred "service" that many hacks sell. What they're really selling is arbor-cide.

(continued)

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE

Hack & Stacks CONTINUED

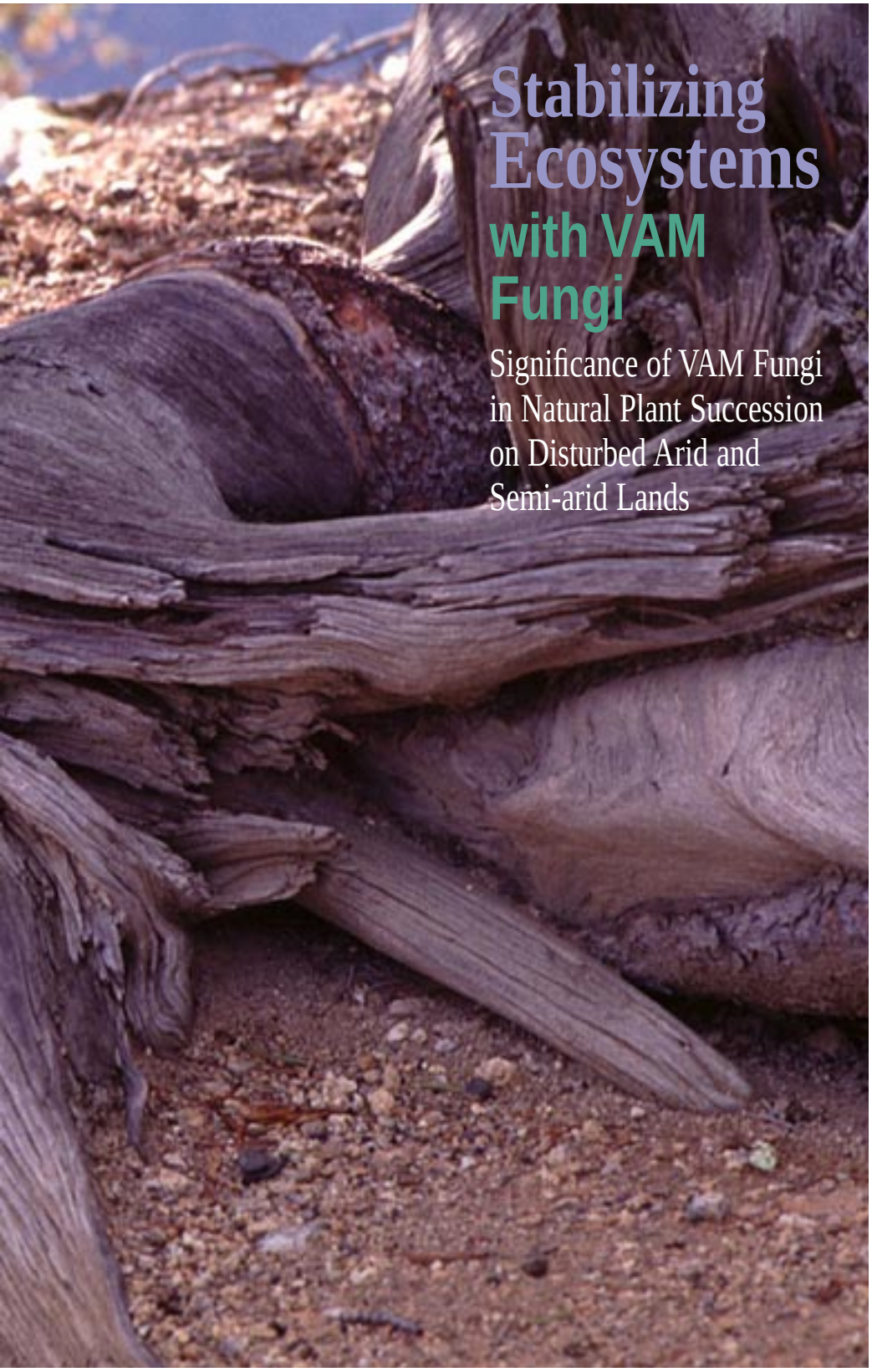
Take a look at your yellow pages. Count the number of tree service ads that list "topping." Why, why, why?!? Most people are driven by money. Taking the time to read the research, learn new techniques, provide training and change the way you do things costs money. In addition, a well-pruned tree won't need to be "done" every year. But for the most part, it actually costs less to do things right.

Sometimes I think there's more to it than money…it's attitude. They see these towering, majestic beings and it makes them feel good to hack them down to size. Control…yeah, it feels good, baby. Harness Mother Nature. I'm the man with the chain saw and what I say goes. And when I'm done—well, that tree's never gonna be the same. It's like breaking a horse.

Short-term thinking is shortening the life span of the largest growing things on earth, trees. We need to think long-term, from the landscape architect to the professional arborist. Those who think and act short-term should be short-term, very short-term. Our oxygen, shade, coolness and property value are at risk, besides the trees themselves. If we take care of our trees, they will help take care of us.

The viewpoint voiced by the guest columnist reflects solely the viewpoint of the writer. It may or may not be representative of the beliefs of Plant Health Care, Inc., its employees, investors or others related to the company. The guest column is included in the PlantHealthCare.com Online Magazine to prompt discussion. Responses, which may be posted, are encouraged. See response options below.

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE



Stabilizing Ecosystems with VAM Fungi

Significance of VAM Fungi in Natural Plant Succession on Disturbed Arid and Semi-arid Lands

BY DR. DONALD H. MARX, Chairman and Principle Scientist, Plant Health Care, Inc.

Vesicular-arbuscular mycorrhizal (VAM) fungi are a major component of the soil microbial community in plant ecosystems. The fungi are important because they form a symbiotic and beneficial relationship with the roots of most green plants (grasses, flowers, forbs, shrubs, and the majority of trees). They contribute to plant growth and survival by reducing on-site stress associated with unfavorable levels of organic matter, nutrition, water, available minerals, soil structure, pH, salt, toxins, heavy metals and biotic (living organisms) factors, such as pathogens (Sylvia and Williams, 1992). In established natural plant communities, VAM are among the most plentiful of the organisms found in soil (Brundett, 1991).

Absence of VAM fungi in soil account for poor survival of plants used to revegetate overburden dumps resulting from mining, especially in arid regions. Lack of VAM also significantly delays secondary plant succession, which is necessary to develop healthy and sustainable plant communities. In the last several years, VAM fungal technology has progressed to allow the mass

(continued)

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE

VAM Fungi on Arid Lands CONTINUED

production of VAM fungal species that are effective on mined lands. Inoculation with VAM fungi in the field and in nurseries greatly enhance the successful establishment and maintenance of permanent, self-sustaining plant and soil ecosystems in these environments.

Most surface soil materials that are left after mining activities do not support healthy soil and plant ecosystems. Mining generates a variety of wastes that influence the establishment of plants, their growth and long-term survival. Because these wastes differ in their biological, chemical and physical attributes, the organic matter, fertility, pH, water-holding capacity, physical properties (i.e., non-cementing), temperature and microbial activity may be adversely affected (Visser, 1985).

One of the first steps in ameliorating the surface soils of mined lands should be the addition of organic matter or soil amendments. These amendments provide an organic and inorganic nutrient source and an environment that enhances the development of fully structured and functional soil microbial communities (Tate and Klein, 1985). These communities are composed of a complex of species that differ in their environmental tolerances, physical requirements and habitat adaptations (Perry et. al., 1987).

In the past, while addition of amendments were considered standard practice, the inoculation of plants or soils with VAM fungi was widely thought to be unnecessary or impractical. Preexisting populations of the naturally occurring fungi were believed to be sufficient, even in arid regions. VAM occur on most plant species growing in temperate semi-natural grasslands, tallgrass prairie, shortgrass steppe, alpine and tundra grasslands and even in the savanna of the Serengeti. They are also extensive in the shrub-land plant communities, high-elevation sagebrush communities, and in plant communities in high-elevation cold deserts, the Chihuahuan Desert, the Sonoran Desert and the deserts of Asia (see 21 references in Miller, 1987).

Early successional weedy annuals may naturally colonize mining wastes in terrestrial, semi-arid and arid areas, bolstering the belief that pre-existing VAM fungal populations are sufficient for plant establishment. However, many of these weeds are not mycorrhizal dependent for their growth and survival. Further, VAM spore densities

(continued)

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE

VAM Fungi on Arid Lands CONTINUED

found in mining wastes of various ages (1 to 31 years old) in Wyoming never reached levels of VAM fungal spores found in adjacent undisturbed sites (Waaland and Allen, 1980). Stockpiling topsoil, initially high in VAM fungal inoculum produced on the roots of the original plant communities, for one to three years will decrease VAM fungal inoculum to less than 10 percent of its original density; longer storage can reduce survival to near zero (Pfleger et. al., 1994). VAM fungal spores in mining wastes can be replenished by blow-in (dust storms), insects and small animals, but this is an extremely slow, natural process that requires decades to fully accomplish.

It has been determined that artificial revegetation from seed of plant species requiring VAM may be unsuccessful because of the low levels of VAM fungal spores found in the disturbed soils (Miller, 1997). Many scientists (see Pfleger et. al., 1994) agree that with low VAM fungal spore density, secondary plant succession (i.e. more mature ecosystem) will be slow. The result is the prolonged longevity of early successional, nonmycorrhizal weedy plants which are not sustainable.

The rate of re-colonization of mining wastes by VAM fungi is significantly controlled by the presence of mycorrhizal-dependent plant species (i.e. the majority of plant species), initial level of VAM fungal spores, harshness of waste material, edaphic (chemical and physical characteristics of the soil) conditions, and time. Also understood is that VAM fungal inoculum levels, as well as the other attributes needed to support a microbial community, are inherently important in the establishment and maintenance of a permanent and healthy plant community (Pfleger et. al., 1994).

There are many scientific publications that show the beneficial effects of VAM on various plant species grown in mining waste from semi-arid and arid lands. Most of these reports are based on small scale studies performed in small on-site plots or in greenhouses and involved only a few dozen plants per study. (Allen, 1992; Safir, 1987; and Pfleger and Linderman, 1994).

Large scale demonstrations or operational level applications of the VAM fungal technology for establishment of plants on mining wastes has not been possible until very recently. Today, spores of selected species of VAM fungi that are proven effective

(continued)

VAM Fungi on Arid Lands CONTINUED

on mining wastes in the arid west are being mass produced. The spores are pelletized with beneficial bacteria for direct field operational application. The VAM fungal spore pellet technology for establishment of direct seeded grasses, flowers, and shrubs, and the technology to custom-inoculate native trees and shrubs in container nurseries are now operational for mined land revegetation (Marrs et. al., 1999). The degree of plant establishment and their sustainability, following these VAM fungal treatments, proves the biological, ecological and economical value of the mycorrhizal technology in revegetation of adverse sites in arid and semi-arid lands.

SUMMARY

Observations on the successional plant patterns in semi-arid habitats indicate that VAM play a major ecological role in the composition and stability of plant communities. Those critical successional plants, which are mycorrhizal, subsequently affect the various ecosystem processes that are critical to forming a stable ecosystem (see 42 references in Allen et. al., 1992). The poor survival of plants used to revegetate overburden dumps that result from mining, especially in arid regions, is accounted for by the absence of VAM fungal propagules. VAM improve the ability of desired plant species to compete with weeds and increase the rate of succession from the weed stage to a stable, diverse plant community. VAM fungal inoculation improves plant productivity by increasing drought tolerance of plants (essential in arid regions) and mineral availability, which are the primary limiting factors in establishing plants on mined lands (see 27 references in Maiti, 1997).

VAM Fungi on Arid Lands CONTINUED

1. *Allen, M.F. 1992. Mycorrhizal Functioning. Chapman and Hall, New York and London.*

2. *Allen, M.F. et. al. 1992. Mycorrhizae and the integration of scales: from molecules to ecosystems, pg. 488-515. In: Mycorrhizal Functioning. Eds. M.F. Allen. Chapman and Hall, New York and London.*

3. *Brundett, M. 1991. Mycorrhizas in natural ecosystems. Advances in Ecological Research 21:171-313.*

4. *Marrs, L.F., Marx, D.H. and Cordell, C.E. 1999. Establishment of vegetation on mined sites by management of mycorrhizae. National Meeting of the American Society for Surface Mining and Reclamation. Scottsdale, AZ, Aug. 1999.*

5. *Maiti, S.K. 1997. Importance of VAM fungi in coal mine overburden reclamation and factors effecting their establishment on overburden dumps. Environ. and Ecology 15:602-608.*

6. *Miller, R.M. 1979. Some occurrences of vesicular-arbuscular mycorrhizae in natural and disturbed ecosystems in the Red Desert. Can. J.Bot. 57:619-623.*

7. *Miller, R.M. 1987. The ecology of vesicular-arbuscular mycorrhizae in grass and shrublands, pg. 135-170. In: Ecophysiology of VA mycorrhizal plants. Safir, G.R., Ed., CRC Press, Inc., Boca Raton, FL.*

8. *Perry, D.A., Molina, R., and Amaranthus, M.P. 1987. Mycorrhizae, mycorrhizosphere and reforestation: current knowledge and research needs. Can. J. For. Res. 17:929-940.*

9. *Pfleger, F.L. and Linderman, R.G. 1994. Mycorrhizae and plant health. American Phytopathological Society Press, St. Paul, MN.*

10. *Pfleger, F.L., Stewart, E.L., and Noyd, R.K. 1994. Role of VAM fungi in mine land revegetation, pg. 47-81. In: Mycorrhizae and Plant Health, The American Phytopathological Society Press, St. Paul, MN.*

11. *Safir, G.R. 1987. Ecophysiology of VA mycorrhizal plants. CRC Press, Inc., Boca Raton, FL.*

12. *Sylvia, D.M. and Williams, S.F. 1992. Vesicular-arbuscular mycorrhizae and environmental stress, pg. 101-124. In: Mycorrhizae and Sustainable Agriculture. Eds. Bethlenfalvay, G.J. and Linderman, R.G. ASA Special Publication 54. Madison, WI. 124 pp.*

13. *Tate, R.L. III, and Klein, D.A. 1985. Soil Reclamation Processes, pg. 1-349. In: Microbial Analysis and Application. Eds. Tate, R.L. and Klein, D.A. Marcal Dekkar, Inc., New York and Basel.*

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE

Multi-Field Facilities Appeal to Fans

BY BRUCE F. SHANK, EDITOR

Privatization of the Ultimate Dream Making Machine

Dreams are very personal. They hinge on one's imagination and the ability to pretend, without any outside interference, that you are doing something phenomenal. For a moment, you are more than an observer, you are the individual performing amazing feats to the admiration of fans.

Those dreams do come true for gifted athletes. Who goes how far really depends on natural skill, discipline, priorities and commitment. But, we all start from the same place, whether that is a frozen farm pond, an asphalt school basketball court, or a vacant field at a local park.

When we are children, we build our own stadiums in our minds. As we grow older, it takes something more tactile, something closer to the actual thing, something like a real ice rink; or the varnished, hardwood floors of an arena; or the spotlighted diamond with fans shouting at you from the stands.

There is no other feeling like it, say those who have been lucky enough to experience fan adulation. It doesn't

(continued)

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE

Dream Machine CONTINUED

matter whether the fans were your relatives at a local soccer game or 45,000 people packed into a stadium, your ears and eyes can only absorb so much positive information at one time. The overload is registered by the ego for years afterwards. Only sports provides such immediate and lasting memories.

The Oderkirk family knows what that feeling is and they have created a way to enable thousands of other people to have their own version. That's why their rapidly growing Big League Dreams Sports Parks were named the Best Sports Complexes in American by the Sportsplex Operators' and Developers' Association (SODA) for 1999.

What makes Ron Oderkirk and his two sons, Rick and Jeff, better at creating sports dreams for others than your average park superintendent is the limelight. All of them experienced first-hand the rush of fan support. But, perhaps, a more important factor is that all of them fell just short of the Major Leagues. Ron peaked as a shortstop with the Yankees' organization, Rick with the Indians as a left-handed pitcher, and Jeff at the University of Southern California as a shortstop like his dad.

All of them achieved respectability in the non-sports venture of real estate development in Southern California. Only later did they find a way to parlay their sports dreams into the real estate development business. At the present, they have one very successful complex in Cathedral City, CA, two slotted to open in the coming months, and three more on the drawing boards. More importantly is they have 60 more offers under consideration.

Why? Maybe because the facility hosts the Pepsi Allstar Softball Games featuring the 25 best players in Major League Baseball. Look for it on television in early March. All proceeds go to the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation. You might be interested in seeing Mike Piazza and Barry Bonds and other allstars playing softball. It is the largest television audience for softball with more than seven million viewers.

Possibly because Big League Dreams Sports Park's fields rival any in professional sports. Conceivably because the outfield bleachers have patented life-size images of

(continued)

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE

Dream Machine CONTINUED

fans and many games have professional announcers. Each field has seating for hundreds of fans and is lighted to professional sports standards.

The facility has three showcase fields, one resembling Yankee Stadium, one Wrigley Field and the third, Boston's Fenway Park. These three fields surround the central restaurant facility with full sports television. Even he two additional fields are named after the Red Socks' Pawtucket Minor League franchise and the Cubs' Des Moines facility. "Leagues alternate fields so all teams get to play in the showcase fields," explains Oderkirk. "They get psyched just like the pros do when they're on the road."

A six-man grounds crew headed by Turf Manager Rick Kerr keeps all five fields to Major League standards. They are hybrid bermudagrass from A-G Sod and are mowed every other day to one inch. "The pros who visit us can't tell the difference between their stadiums and our park," boasts Kerr. "That' what we want for our leagues and we try to keep it that way with up to six games per field per day. Major League groundskeepers have it easier than we do."

Leagues pay Big League Dreams Sports Park a fee, just as they would with a public park. "I think we charge less than local park leagues and the teams get much more," says Oderkirk. "We market heavily and have more than 200 leagues playing here each year. Pepsi and Budweiser have serious promotional programs here. We've been featured in Sports Illustrated, the Las Angeles Times and by NBC. It's all very professional."

The icing on the cake is the facility offers lessons from Mark Cresse, who was batting coach of the Los Angeles Dodgers for 25 years. A full training program is available for players who want to improve their game.

Big League Dreams Sports Parks is located on land leased from Cathedral City, next to the city's library. The city opted to let a private contractor build a park to attract tournaments to the area, rather than try to do it with city staff. It has worked so well that Riverside, Chino Hills and Temecula invited Big League Dreams to bid on similar

(continued)

Dream Machine CONTINUED

facilities. More than 60 requests for cooperative ventures have reached the company's offices in Cathedral City.

"We believe strongly in the privatization concept," adds Oderkirk. "We believe we can do a better job at a lower cost for public park districts. We generate sales tax revenue and bring new recreational opportunity everywhere we go." Each facility has roller hockey, basketball, beach volleyball and indoor soccer in addition to hardball and softball.

Oderkirk urges cities interested in the multi-sport facility concept to contact him at (760) 408-5957 or the Sportsplex Operators and Developers Association in Rochester, NY, (716) 426-2215 or its website www.sportsplexoperators.com.

"It's hard to dream about a fantastic sports achievement when the field you play on is not well maintained, the officiating is amateurish, and the fields are not well lighted because of budgets," he adds. "We believe in dreams and know that everyone can't play in the Big Leagues. But, on the other hand, for a few hours each week, you can come close to the real thing at our parks. It's a great feeling that keeps our players young and active. Fans like to play too. We never forget that.

Bruce Shank is owner of BioCOM, a horticultural communications company located in Palmdale, CA. He can be reached at 661-722-1698 or irricom1@earthlink.net.

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE

About Planthealthcare.com Online Magazine

PlantHealthCare.com Online Magazine is posted at www.planthealthcare.com for professionals who produce, design and maintain plant material in the arbor, landscape architecture/design, landscape maintenance, nursery/greenhouse, and parks and recreation industries. Published as an educational service by Plant Health Care, Inc., the PlantHealthCare.com Online Magazine is designed to engage, educate and inform professionals about new technologies that promote the health of plants, specifically those that create “sustainable” landscapes that cost less, provide more value and last longer. The magazine also seeks to open discussion about issues that impact the many businesses that serve the plant health industry.

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE

Meet Your Editors

Editors

Bruce F. Shank
Editor

Bruce Shank is owner of BioCOM, a horticultural communications company based in Palmdale, CA. He is the editor of *Irrigation Business & Technology*, managing editor of *TurfGrass Trends*, and former editor of *Landscape & Irrigation*, *Landscape Management* and *sportsTURF* magazines. He was graduated by the University of Missouri—Columbia with a degree in agricultural journalism in 1973. He is a past president of the American Society of Business Press Editors and a member of the Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association.

Felicia L. Gillham
Managing Editor

Felicia Gillham is owner of Gillham & Associates Marketing Communications, a San Diego, CA firm she established in 1989 to service the needs of turf and ornamental, agricultural and biotechnology companies. Articles written by Gillham on behalf of her clients have appeared in more than 100 Green Industry and farm trade publications. She is a 1980 graduate of the University of Missouri—Columbia with a degree in agricultural journalism. Gillham is a member of the Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association, American Agricultural Editor's Association and the National Association of Farm Broadcasters.

Editors CONTINUED

Guest Editor: Helen M. Stone

After earning a B.A. degree from San Diego State University with honors in theater arts, Stone returned to school and earned dual Associates Degrees in Landscape Management and Nursery Management at Cuyamaca College in El Cajon, CA. She began writing a regular gardening column for the Daily Californian in El Cajon while completing her final year. In 1987, Stone became the horticulturist for the Sheraton Hotels in San Diego, managing the grounds and interior plantings in the 1,000-room, 20-acre resort complex. She also began writing a regular gardening column for the San Diego Union, Sunday edition.

In January, 1991, Stone moved to Las Vegas and became the editor of Southwest Lawn & Landscape, a tabloid publication for green industry professionals in the desert Southwest, and Golden State Fairways, the official publication of the California Golf Course Superintendents Association. The latter publication was acquired by California-based Adams Publishing in March, 1992. She became the publication's editor, as well as the editor for Arbor Age. In January, 1995, Stone was promoted to editorial director, managing nine green industry publications and a staff of eight.

In October, 1996, Stone returned to Las Vegas and founded her own company, Stone Peak Services. Her company publishes Southwest Trees & Turf, a regional publication for turf and landscape professionals in the arid Southwest. Current circulation is 9,000. She is also the conference coordinator for the annual Desert Green conference in Las Vegas, now in its fourth year. A joint effort between the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension and several green industry associations, the conference draws about 250 professionals each November.

Stone is current president of the Nevada Shade Tree Council, board member of the Southern Nevada Landscape Association, newsletter editor of the Southern Nevada Chapter American Society of Landscape Architects (SNASLA), newsletter editor for the Southern Nevada Golf Course Superintendents Association, board member for the Southern Nevada Arborists Group, and a member of the International Society of Arboriculture, Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association, and Garden Writers Association of America (GWAA). Stone has won numerous landscaping and writing awards.

Editors CONTINUED

Guest Science Editor: Donald H. Marx, Ph.D.

Donald H. Marx, Ph.D., is the winner of the esteemed Marcus Wallenberg Prize for Forestry (considered the equivalent to a Nobel Prize) awarded by the King of Sweden for his work on the practical application of mycorrhizal fungi. Dr. Marx served the U.S. Forest Service for 37 years conducting extensive research on the use of mycorrhizal fungi to improve forest regeneration worldwide, as well as work in air pollution, stress relationships in trees, use of organic soil amendments, reclamation, exotic tropical forestry and nursery management. Dr. Marx was the founder of the Institute for Mycorrhizal Research and Development (1974) and the Institute of Tree Root Biology for the Forest Service (1990). He is the author of more than 270 scientific papers in forest microbiology and has presented more than 310 invitational lectures in 27 countries, as well as at many major universities in the U.S.

Dr. Marx is currently Chairman and Principal Scientist for Plant Health Care, Inc. In addition to his work directing the research and development of PHC products, he lectures throughout the U.S. and other countries, and is the instructor of the two-day Plant Health Care, Inc., Plant Biology Workshop held four times a year near Beaufort, SC.

PlantHealthCare.com
ONLINE MAGAZINE

Calendar of Industry Events

February

6-9
ALCA Executive Forum, Las Vegas, NV. (703) 736-9666.

9-11
Western Pennsylvania Turf Conference and Show, Monroeville. (814) 863-3475.

9-10
New Jersey Turf Trade Show, Somerset. (609) 291-7070.

10-12
Turfgrass Producers International Midwinter Expo, San Antonio, TX. (847) 705-9898.

14-20
International Golf Course Conference and Show, New Orleans, LA. (800) 472-7878.

16-17
Landscape Industry Show, Long Beach, CA. (800) 448-2522.

16-18
Landscape Contractors of Maryland, Virginia and Washington D.C., Bethesda, MD. (301) 948-0810.

20-25
Cornell Turfgrass Basic Short Course, Hudson Valley. (607) 255-1792.

21-25
Turfgrass Management Short Course, Fishkill. (607) 255-1792.

21-25
Internal Erosion Control Association Expo, Palm Springs, CA. (970) 879-3010.

23
New Jersey Landscape Trade Show, Secaucus. (201) 664-6310.

23
Sandhills Turf & Ornamental Conference, Carthage, NC. (910) 947-3188.

Calendar

February, continued

28 - March 3

Indiana-Illinois Turfgrass Short Course, Willowbrook, IL. (765) 494-8039.

March

1

Nassau, Suffolk Turf & Plant Conference, Huntington, NY. (516) 665-2000.

6-9

New England Turfgrass Conference, Newport, RI. (401) 848-0004.

9

New York State Turfgrass Association Western Regional Conference. Buffalo. (800) 873-8873.

24-25

Plant Biology Workshop, Plant Health Care, Inc. Education Center, Frogmore, SC.

April

5

New York State Turfgrass Association Adirondack Regional Conference, Lake Placid. (800) 873-8873.

October

13-14

Plant Biology Workshop, Plant Health Care, Inc. Education Center, Frogmore, SC.

November

3-4

Plant Biology Workshop, Plant Health Care, Inc. Education Center, Frogmore, SC.