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# OFFICE & COMMERCIAL

REAL ESTATE MAGAZINE

Volume X, Spring 2010

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LANDSCAPING



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care which covered soil biology, horticultural practices, and managing customer expectations.

Tom Lupfer, CLT, Sustainable Landscape Inc., and chairman of the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association Sustainable Landscaping Committee points out that economics have become a key factor in the decision to adopt a natural lawn care program: "As a contractor, I know that when you reduce irrigation costs, multiple fertilizer applications, the fuel and transportation costs incurred to ship these chemicals from a centralized processing plant to the consumer, the waste generated by a one-size-fits-all product-oriented approach, and the frequency of replacing plants because of hostile site conditions, you reduce long-term costs."

Most large property owners are serviced by landscape companies who should have a general sense of these principles. The property owner or manager should speak with their landscape account manager to determine if a natural lawn care program makes sense. The conversation must center on the balance between the costs of a natural lawn care program and what features

are impacted by pesticide use including plants, water, animals, and humans.

"Clients are asking about options... we have two LEED-certified members on our staff to provide them with a 'green' point-person who can offer guidance and answer questions," says John Mockus, CTP-CSL, of Kinsella Landscape in Blue Island. "We now better understand that a natural lawn care program can be implemented on any site, regardless of size, location, or existing conditions, as well as ways to adapt the program to fit a wide variety of budgets and resources. It's also crucial to have an educated and trained professional monitoring the program, especially during the first transition year."

Ultimately, the decision to implement a natural lawn care program is based on two questions: how is the landscape used and who uses it? If the landscape is consistently used (athletics, exercise, walking paths, courtyards, etc.) and the users are children, the elderly, or those with health concerns, a natural lawn care program could make sense. For example, if there is a day care center or medical offices on the property the property manag-

er should consider who is exposed to pesticide use. If the property is simply about "view outside the window" aesthetics, a traditional lawn care and maintenance plan has merit.



*Scott Grams is executive director of the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association (ILCA). ILCA is pledged to serve as a forum for the free exchange of ideas among landscape contractors, their suppliers and the government, working together for a greener, more beautiful Illinois. ILCA is a nonprofit trade association with more than 800 member companies. Denise Shuty is a construction-writer and public relations consultant..*

*For more information, ILCA provides a link on its website at [www.ilca.net](http://www.ilca.net) for consumers and others interested in adopting a natural lawn care program and is currently developing additional resources for property owners and managers. The Safer Pest Control Project also lists qualified service providers on its website at [www.spcpweb.org](http://www.spcpweb.org).*

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# *All natural* — HOW NATURAL LAWN CARE TECHNIQUES ARE GAINING GROUND WITH PROPERTY MANAGERS

**By Scott Grams**  
ILCA  
Executive Director

**Denise Shuty**  
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Construction-Writer & Public Relations Consultant

Commercial and public property owners and managers have complex landscapes. They are a patchwork of styles and features that come together to form an aesthetically pleasing and functional space. The one tie that binds all of the various features is turfgrass. It weaves in and out of our landscapes and its lush, green appearance is a universal symbol of health and care.

Yet, the lush, green appearance can be the result of a steroid-like habit of “juicing” our lawns with synthetics and chemical enhancers. After years of research and field trials, natural lawn care is now a viable alternative and proven turf management method. It is economically feasible and environmentally friendly – which has become the hallmark of property management in the past 10 years.

## What is natural lawn care?

“First, we have to dispel some common myths,” says Steve Pincuspy of the Safer Pest Control Project. “Natural lawn care is not the same as *no care*. There are distinct methods and procedures just like with any maintenance program. It’s not about having a native prairie instead of lawn; it’s still the same green grass you sit, stand, play or lay on; it doesn’t mean you’ll end up having a field of dandelions or masses of brown spots from lawn grubs – a healthy lawn can resist these attackers better than one that is kept

*“Property owners use roughly 3 million tons of fertilizer and 7 billion gallons of water annually to feed their lawns.”*

alive on an infusion of chemicals.” A natural lawn care program is more holistic and uses brands of pesticide and fertilizer that are entirely organic. Some programs allow for a bridge fertilizer to be used which is a step between synthetic and organic.

## The pesticide problem

Landscape and water management form a tight bond. Many property owners have lakes, ponds, and water features that act as the centerpiece of the landscape. Pesticide use and runoff can have direct implications on the health of these systems. It makes little sense to save money on the landscape and then give that money right back fixing the ecology of the pond.

Further, there is a human element to consider. Pincuspy adds, “These chemicals are linked to a number of

health care issues including cancer, asthma, and Parkinson’s disease. With grass being the biggest crop by area in the United States, making up one-quarter of urban landscapes, the problem is all around us, where we live, work, play golf, walk our dogs, and lay out our picnic blankets. Each of these situations counts as an exposure. Property owners use roughly 3 million tons of fertilizer and 7 billion gallons of water annually to feed their lawns.”

Property managers have all adopted high-efficiency measures and recycling programs for their interior spaces (think CFL bulbs, low-flow toilets and showers, paper recycling). It’s time to take that same approach with the maintenance of our exterior spaces. We see recycling bins in every office yet forget the practice as soon as we walk out the office door at night.

## Transitioning to natural lawn care

For the building owner or manager, tenant, community association, or homeowner interested in transitioning to a Natural Lawn Care program there are many resources available to make that decision confidently, and trained professionals who can make the process seamless. More than 50 member firms of the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association recently went through a training workshop on natural lawn