



A MESSAGE FROM *Jeff*

MISUNDERSTANDING

Sometimes we hear that all we do is make excuses for what has happened to a property. I would tell you we make educated diagnosis based on our years of experience and training to provide accurate answers.

Often the miss-understanding is created by someone who is involved but may not be as well trained or educated. For example an irrigation person might tell you that area gets plenty of water. My first question would be what is "plenty"? While it has gotten better many of them just do not understand that "plenty" is $\frac{3}{4}$ of 1 inch, each time the system runs. That same person will be quick to tell you it is bugs or fungus causing the problem. My second question would be what kind of bugs or fungus? If they are so sure then they should know what the problem is, wouldn't you agree?

When it comes to landscaping as a rule there is us, the installers, the people mowing, the person doing irrigation, you, and in some cases others that just want to offer their opinion. The bottom line is we are the group that is judged solely on the way our properties look. I hear from landscapers, landscape installers, and even customers, "I would not want your job". It is difficult, and in this article we will try to explain the challenges we face throughout the year with the sole purpose of reducing or eliminating miss-understandings.

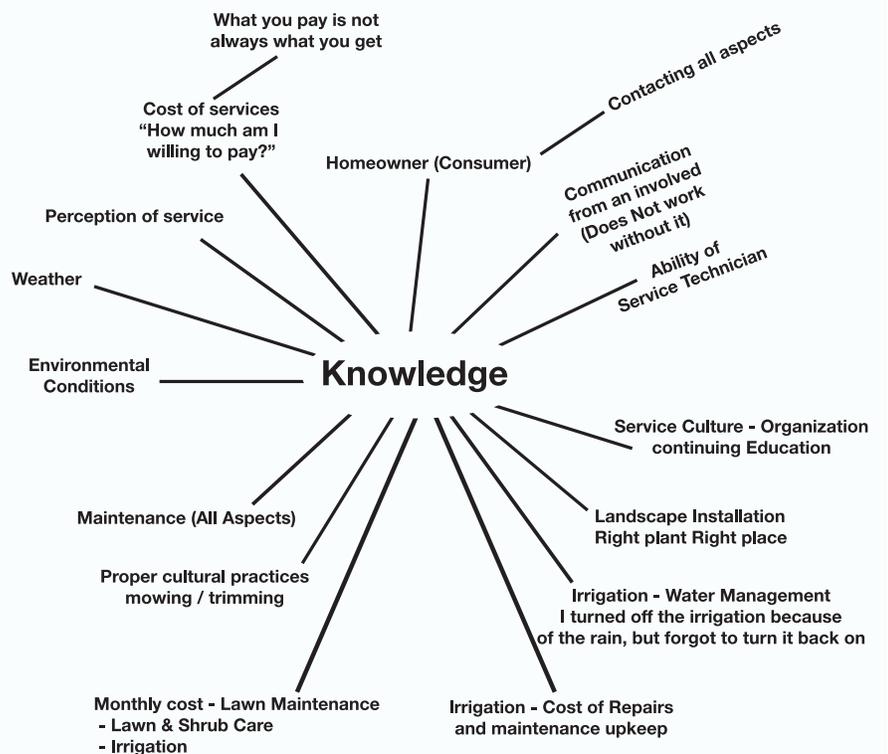
As we look at the landscape industry as a whole, which includes insect and disease control, fertilization, weed control, mowing, trimming shrubs, tree care, and irrigation. A key component in the success of all we do is the weather. In several articles in this newsletter we discuss weather conditions as an issue or making an impact on our properties. The inconsistency of

Florida weather conditions is what wrecks havoc for all trades when it comes to landscape maintenance!

In many conversations with customers we find a lot of the time the customers just do not understand but desire to have the correct answers. How could it be dry it is raining all the time? Why did this plant die? So much of what goes on in our landscape is not typically caused by one single issue. We find that there are usually 2-3 issues that have combined to create the scenario that caused the decline or death of turf, shrubs, or trees. Figuring out what happened from all the possibilities can be extremely difficult. While at great expense it is possible, performing an autopsy on a plant just does not make sense financially. Some things are obvious just due to our experience of dealing with these issues year after year for over 30 years. Some issues may take time to correctly identify but eventually we can develop a sequence of events that allowed the problem to manifest itself. That is when we can put a comprehensive plan in place to correct or cure the problem.

In the past we wrote an article titled the Service Challenge. This article is similar as this is an ongoing issue for all involved. Ideally this wraps-up more of the mitigating factors involved in the daily success or failure of our services.

As most of you are probable aware, this can be very difficult line of work. The human factor is what drives our services. All service technicians in our industry face daily challenges. The work itself can be very physically demanding. *(cont. on pg. 2)*



MISUNDERSTANDING cont.

Then you factor in our weather conditions of 95 degrees, with a heat index of 100 degrees, plus rain. Struggling through the physical demands is daunting. Add trying to get customers serviced before or after the rain. Did our application benefit from the rain or did it just get washed away. Did our weed control work. Service a property half way through and the landscaper shows up and just starts working. We all have schedules and routes need to be completed. We usually defer to the landscaper and come back later or reschedule for another day. The education level required for our technicians continues to grow. We believe that we should and do learn something new every day. If you are not learning you are not trying and will not grow. Florida is very challenging as our environment is always fluctuating. We are entering a better time of the year for us. With cooler temperatures and less rain we are able to get a better handle on issues in our landscapes.

The diagram we call the Multi-Prong Cycle of Service in this article hopefully sheds some light on all the factors involved in the servicing of your property.

Maintenance companies work their tails off. But what do they really know? We have a lot of great and knowledgeable landscapers out there, but there are far more that only know how to go through the motions. Understanding about proper mowing height for the types of turf. St Augustine always preforms better at 3 ½ inch to 4 inches. Zoysia looks its best at 1 ½ inch to 2 inches. Understanding proper trimming technique. Most landscapers over trim our shrubs, but in our desire to have a well maintained landscape we force their hand. When to trim, how much to trim, why do plants not bloom like the ones next to it, next door or across the street. Plant knowledge is incredibly limited with our landscapers. This is again the miss-understanding as to why things happen in our landscape that we as people just cannot understand.

We thrive on teaching and educating our technicians, landscapers, and customers. With education we all grow and have a better understanding as to the why. This does not mean that everything will be perfect all the time, but it should be right most of the time, BUT sometimes it is just going to take time to make things right.

CHANGES IN YOUR LANDSCAPE

Weather conditions like our most recent event Hurricane Irma certainly affect our landscape. Many trees had been blown partially or completely down. Suddenly shaded areas are now in more sunlight and it will take time for them to acclimate. This summer I lost a tree exposing my Camellias to full sun. For a few months the leaves had scorch but as new growth came on, it adapted to the sun. This will likely happen on many of your properties if you had tree loss. Turf always does best with more sun but what did all the debris left for weeks on the ground result in? If it was St Augustine it likely is dead. If it was Zoysia which does grow on rhizomes and tubers it is very possible it will come back. As a homeowner it will be your call of do you want to wait a few months or re-sod to fix it now.



DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME WATERING

This is the time of year we are all told to set the irrigation down to 1 time weekly by our municipalities and water conservation groups. Some landscapers, lawn companies, and even irrigation companies will often say the same thing. It is the easiest way out. This always creates issues.

Depending on temperatures, plant material, and conditions at your property this may not be frequent enough. All properties are different and you may know your property better than anyone so reduce to what you feel comfortable with. We have outlined a somewhat effective irrigation program for our seasonal situations. This plan is outside of water restrictions, so it is up to you on setting your frequency. Supplementing as needed especially under particular conditions will be necessary, especially around large Oak trees as there is a lot of moisture competition. It is also a lot more work keeping up with our containerized plants. Drip irrigation works great to help keep up with this issue.

Watering regimen for November through March as a standard rule of thumb.

November – every 5th day to 1 x per week

December – every 5th day to 1 x per week

January – 1 x per week

February – 1 x per week

March – begin 2 times per week



These frequencies are dependent on daily temperatures. The cooler the season the less frequently water is required. As always if you have any questions please do not hesitate to call for more information and a more specific guide to water your individual property.

DISEASE SEASON IS HERE!

The holidays are almost upon us. This alone makes this a busy time of the year. For your landscape this makes it an extremely challenging time of year. This is the beginning of FUNGUS season.

Large Patch, Zoysia Patch or as it is commonly called Brown Patch Fungus are all the same *Rhizoctonia* Blight or stem rot disease. This disease is very common throughout our area. The frequency of moisture being added will drive this disease, it is primarily a seasonal disease, and this is the season.

If you have had Brown Patch Fungus in the past it is likely you will have it again. It is a soil born organism that will survive in the soil all year long. It is a valuable organism that breaks down organic matter back into the soil. When conditions get right it begins to spread aggressively to the point that it begins to damage healthy tissue. You can play a key role in controlling this disease by reducing your irrigation frequency. As temperatures cool down soil does not dry as quickly, so replenishing the moisture will be required less frequently. This is good news for those wishing to save some money on the monthly water bill.

Irrigation and irrigation frequency is something we talk about all year. In spring it starts getting hot and we have to water more. Then in early summer it gets real hot but it also starts raining. Sometimes it may rain hard in one area and less than a mile away there is no rain for days. Summer is a very tough season for irrigation. One week there is not enough water and the next everything is drowning. In the fall it tends to cool off but with the cooler weather comes lower humidity. We can go for days with no rain and then all of a sudden on one hot dry windy day everything dries up. Winter is usually the most stable time of the year for irrigation. It is cool, the days are short, and plants slow greatly concerning growth and need for moisture resulting in a very low need for added irrigation.

This time of the year we need you to reduce the frequency. Irrigating every 3rd or 4th day is more ideal for landscape in full sun. Shady, low, wet, and lake side areas require even less. These areas likely will only need water one time per week. Some control clocks can be set so you do water more in the sunny areas and less in shady wet areas.



HOLIDAY TIPS

This time of year there is a lot going on. Shopping, guests, bringing stuff down from the attic, garage, or shed, and so on.

Since we live in this beautiful state, many of us will have the doors and windows open and some even a party or two on the back patio. I would like to share some tips on keeping pests out.

When you bring in the holiday decorations, open the boxes in the garage and take just a minute to visually ensure no pests have set up housekeeping in the container. After a quick inspection you should be able to move the boxes and containers inside the living space.

Merchandise in the stores goes flying off the shelves this time of year. It is the least likely time to bring home hitch-hikers when making purchases. However, you early shoppers should take just a minute to look over the holiday items that may have been in storage all summer from last year. It is common for stores to break out what they didn't sell last holiday season and put it on the shelves. Just look for any signs of bugs or pepper size particles in the container.



On those cool nights when you decide to light up the fireplace make sure you open the flue. Maybe even have a little reminder to close it when done, so your HVAC dollars don't get sucked out the chimney. Every year we get calls about bugs showing up around the fire place. When it is cold the pest hiding in the wood will become extremely lethargic. When you bring that wood inside, and it begins to warm up, the pest may become active. If you store your firewood outside try not to bring in more than you plan to use and again it might be wise to bring some in the garage where it will stay dry and the pests will leave before you bring it into the living area.

Having an outside event? Those pesky mosquitoes will be trying to crash your party. For those of you that already have mosquito control you can call at the beginning of the month and schedule your treatment 3 to 7 days prior to your event. If you have not signed up for mosquito control we will be very happy to provide you with a one-time service at a very reasonable rate. We are certain you will be surprised with how well it works at keeping the mosquitos away.

Finally if you do have any issues through the holidays just give us a call and we will do all we can to get the pest out before the guests arrive. Best wishes to all and your families!

FLOWERING PLANTS

In this article we are going to talk about Flowering Plants. Fall, which is finally here, is the best time to enjoy our blooming plants. With the weather change bringing cooler nights and warm days “not too hot.”

We see a dramatic change in our landscape plants. Gardenia's budding and blooming. These also have a lot of leaf drop this time of year or yellowing foliage. Be prepared for Camellias which are so prolific and showy. These are my favorite plants, to watch change. It is not uncommon for a plant to not bloom along with the rest. It could be the soil, its age, the way it was pruned and when, it gets just a little more or less sun. We always apply the proper nutrients to your plants based on the plant. These environmental conditions are not so controllable. So if you have that one plant that just does not bloom, do a comparison with the others and you might think of an event or cause that can be corrected. By the way, sometimes Mother Nature is just having an effect.

There are numerous other blooming plants; Roses, Bougainvillea, Mandevilla, Bromeliads, Susanqua Camelia, Crown of Thorns, Hamelia-Colusa (Humming Bird Bush), Tea Olive, Beautyberry, Hibiscus, Fashion, Vivid, and Duc de Rohan Azaleas, Oleander, Tibouchina, Thryallis, Jatropa, Downy and Angelwing Jasmine, Asian Snow, Buttercup, Poinsettia, and Christmas Cactus, Plumbago. And Crotons with their many varieties are always colorful. Even some of the trees are blooming like Silk Floss, Cassia, and Bottle Brush.

We strive throughout the year to keep all your plants healthier, pest, and disease free. Applying our custom granular fertilizer 2x a year and our shrub spray throughout the season. It is also important to understand that some buds and blooms are very sensitive to sprays. During this season we pay close attention to this and if a plant has a problem we will carefully determine if it is serious or if it can wait until the blooming season is over. If we do see a problem we will let you know we are aware and what the best option is to keep the plant healthy.

Enjoy your blooming plants throughout Fall and The Holiday season.



LEAF DROP SEASON

This is the beginning of leaf drop season. As a reminder leaf blowers do cause a lot of damage to tender plant tissue. With the recent hurricane Irma you can see the power of wind. It was a Category 4 with winds of 140 mph. This is the same speed the air comes out of an average leaf blower. It is ok to have some leaves on the ground in your shrub beds. The blower shreds and desiccates leaf tissue severely affecting the aesthetics of your plants. Please talk with your landscaper so they take the time to watch what and where they are blowing. Blowers are usually the suspect if your mulch disappears during the year. Look under and behind your plants, it is probably piled up against the plant trunk and walls of your home. These piles should be cleaned and leveled back out as too much leaf litter can affect nutritional and fungicide treatments and also may block moisture from reaching the ground in the root zone.



ST AUGUSTINE

This time of the year your St Augustine should begin to slow down foliage growth and color should improve. Cooler temperatures really make a difference for the color of the grass. Irrigation will play a key role in overall appearance, disease control, and weed control. Many landscapers will reduce to cutting turf every other week. Do not allow them to cut your grass shorter as this is a common industry practice. This is scalping and it is extremely stressful. With the shorter days meaning less sunlight available the turf needs the foliage so it does not thin out. As importantly a “tight cut” also cuts out all your color, when it should be at its best.



ZOYSIA

This can become a challenging time of the year for Zoysia. Our major concern is Brown Patch Fungus. Prevention is the best approach as Zoysia is slower to recover from disease issues. Also cooler temperatures and excess moisture may result in the Zoysia not having good color. An alternative to retain color in Zoysia is lawn paint. This is truly a beneficial application. Color will hold for 30 to 45 days depending on the growth of the turf. This is also a good time of the year for Zoysia as maintenance issues really slow down but it is still important to maintain an every other week cutting for aesthetics. Edging and weed eating become almost unnecessary but you should still edge one time per month, just to keep the edges sharp and crisp.



HURRICANE IRMA - TREE DEBRIS & DEAD GRASS

We are being told it will take months to clean up all the tree debris. In some areas cleanup has begun and what is left under that pile of limbs, leaves, and so on does not look very promising. The longer the debris is on the ground the less likely the grass will be to recover. If you had tree debris lying on your grass and it did not get removed within the first 2 weeks following the storm that grass is dead. The only way to fix this issue will be to put in new sod. Do not expect the damage areas to grow back in. If there is any green in those spots it will be weeds.



DAMAGE FROM DROUGHT

It is more common than not that at some point, plants or turf will be damaged or killed from lack of water. There are 2 things you can count on in Florida, 1. It will rain 2. It will stop raining.



For many plants when the soil gets dry the root system is damaged. When the plant reaches its maximum tolerance the root system dies. No roots and the plant dies. It will not grow back but weeds will. The hardest part of all this is we always have a dry season in the spring and again in the fall. The damage done during one of these events impacts the plant for months. If the plant gets dry before it has completely recovered the damage compiles and the plant just gets weaker.

Often the homeowner does not see the damage when it is happening. Everyone has symptoms of dry soil at the same time so we will say to our self it will be OK, everyone is having this problem. Then a month or 2 later when it starts raining again, we wonder why did this plant or grass die? It can't be water because it is raining every day.

While we run irrigation systems all year long the plain fact is that during a dry period it is critical the system works properly. That 1 or 2 weeks in

the spring or fall when we have our seasonal dry period will leave you with issues the rest of the year, if your irrigation system fails. When we get in those periods it becomes crucial to get the irrigation system repaired as quickly as possible. As a rule everyone has the same issue so there is just not enough time or man power to get the system fixed quickly and this results in additional damage.

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”.

Get your irrigation system inspected over the winter when demands are low so you will not have issues in the spring, when it becomes critical that the system is functioning at 100%. If your controller is outside you can call our office and we will do the inspection and you will not need to be home. If the controller is inside we will be happy to set up an inspection appointment that fits your schedule. At the completion of the inspection we will provide you with a report of our findings.



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NEW TURF AND LANDSCAPE



If you do install new turf this time of the year over watering can cause great damage. In the dead of summer the new turf's shallow root system dries out extremely fast. It may even need to be watered 2 times a day. This time of the year it could be 2 or 3 days before the root system dries out. Ideally new turf should be watered when the soil begins to dry. This requires checking daily and turning the irrigation on when needed. This will only be required for a few weeks and then you will be able to begin a regimen again. The effort will outweigh the irreversible damage of over or under watering. You are welcome to call our office if you would like more specific advice based on your property and the new turf you have selected.

Please be careful when installing new trees and shrubs. It seems the growers are using potting material that is courser than we have seen in years past. This is done so nutrients and moisture can be controlled to speed up the growth of the plants while in the nursery. Make sure the root balls are broken up and try to mix a little loose soil from the planting area into the root ball. We have seen many plants die from drought even though the soil is wet in the bed, the root ball has dried out. Hand watering the base of the trunk 1 time per week for the first month will help insure you do not have a water problem. It is also critical to not install plants to deep. The root flares should be at grade or even a little above grade. You can install a plant too shallow with very little adverse effect. If you install plants even 1/2 inch too deep everything from poor general health, lack of blooming, to premature death will be the result. A simple rule is all trunk bark and root flares should be exposed and above grade when you finish installing a plant. Properly installed mulch is not an issue, just make sure no dirt is covering the areas mentioned.

EMAIL THE EDITOR

Do you have a question or comment you would like addressed in an upcoming newsletter?
Send them to the editor at: qualityfirst@qfls.co

Some of the information in our newsletter may be repetitive throughout the year.

As things change from season to season and year to year we come across these issues as they repeat themselves. With respect to all our long term customers it is good to refresh our memories from season to season but also to let all of our new customers in on the information.