



# Going Beyond the Lawn

## Good Landscape Management Takes the Whole Property into Consideration

by Mike Swaggerty

**L**ush, green turf is a wonderful sight to behold, and there's no denying how critical it is to your property's overall curb appeal. But can your community association get by on beautiful grass alone? Not likely. Lawn areas make up just a portion of your overall landscape, and there are many details to consider in keeping your whole property in top condition. For example, most community associations have a wide variety of trees, shrubs, and lawn areas, along with flower and mulch beds in all sizes, shapes, and kinds. Each of these areas needs regular care and maintenance in order to look their best throughout the year.

When you think of your property as a living, growing investment, it makes sense to enhance it with professional grounds management that will keep it growing in beauty and value for years to come. This includes both lawn and landscape maintenance programs through

each season of the year. Below are some suggestions to help ensure that you've got your bases covered.

### Lawn Maintenance

Having beautiful, healthy turf requires a carefully designed program of care that addresses each and every aspect of the lawn's health and growth needs. In addition to regular mowing and watering, and depending on your specific grass type, your lawn maintenance program may include the following:

- *Fertilization.* The proper fertilizer for your soil and grass type needs to be applied in the right amounts and at the right times of year. For example, St. Augustine grass needs to be fertilized four times per year, while Bahia grass needs fertilizing twice per year. Applied correctly, fertilizer will improve both the color and density of your lawn areas, making them less prone to weeds, insects, and other pests.
- *Weed Control.* Through the use of pre-emergent and post-emergent applications, weeds can be controlled before they have a chance to overrun the health and beauty of your lawn areas.
- *Insect Control.* Regular inspections and effective treatments can be used to control lawn insects before they have a chance to inflict any long-term damage.
- *Disease Control.* Lawns are susceptible to hundreds of harmful fungus diseases. A healthy, growing lawn is the best defense, but if fungus diseases do appear in your turf, steps can be taken to keep them under control.

- *Renovation Practices.* When necessary, core aeration, reseeding and other renovation practices can be used to repair or rejuvenate a lawn that is struggling due to heat and drought stress or other adverse conditions.

### Landscape Maintenance

Each community association has unique needs when it comes to landscape maintenance, and developing an effective plan for your property requires a thorough evaluation of your landscape to determine what services are necessary. Depending on your property's specific requirements, you should expect some or all of the following to be included in your landscape maintenance plan:

- *Tree and Shrub Fertilization.* Regular fertilization will strengthen the root systems of your trees and shrubs, leading to increased vigor, better blooming, and improved resistance to insects and diseases.
- *Tree and Shrub Pruning.* Your palm trees should be trimmed once per year during the dormant season. In addition, your ornamental trees and shrubs need regular pruning and trimming to encourage healthier growth and to help them maintain a more pleasing appearance. Pruning can also be used to decrease the chances of storm damage to your valuable landscape plants.
- *Tree and Shrub Insect/Disease Control.* This may include horticultural oils, foliar spray applications, or trunk injections as needed to keep harmful insects or diseases at bay.
- *Floral Care.* Flowers can be changed out as the seasons change to ensure that your property always has a fresh look. Potted specimens and even hanging baskets can be maintained as well.
- *General Care.* This usually includes mulching, edging, bed weeding, and property clean-up throughout the seasons.
- *Irrigation System Maintenance.* Regular inspections should be provided to verify that your system is operating efficiently and timers are working properly, with repairs being made when necessary.
- *Emergency Services.* This includes fast response when needed, such as when a fallen tree needs to be removed after a bad storm.

The above service listings are intended to give you a starting point in the development of a comprehensive grounds management plan that will keep your lawn and landscape looking great year-round. The next step is to meet with a reputable grounds management company to discuss your specific needs in detail.

A good place to start is with other community associations' properties. Find out who services some properties you admire, and then contact those providers to set up consultations. After evaluating your property's current condition and determining your goals, each provider should be able to present you with a detailed lawn and landscape maintenance proposal that is custom-tailored to your unique needs. Then, you can make a decision based on which one offers the most value for the price quoted. You'll also want to take into consideration each provider's licensing and insurance, years of experience, breadth of services, employee training practices, and crew management style.

With a grounds management plan that addresses the needs of both your lawn and your landscape, you'll be presenting your property in the best light possible. Not only will this help to keep your current residents happy, but it will improve potential residents' first impressions of your community association. That's an investment worth making.

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