



# Developing a Standard Landscape Maintenance Specification

by Tom Jacob

**O**ver the past twenty years, I have seen the landscape industry become more professional, from licensing and certification to enforcement of personnel and environmental safety. However, I often run into board members or property managers that have no idea of their current maintenance specifications or what is needed. Very often, they rely on me as a professional to provide those specifications. To get competitive bids, associations must first make sure they are comparing apples to apples and have a standard specification in place. Generally, in South Florida, there is a basic maintenance specification that could be

implemented on most properties to provide a level of service that would appease most everyone and stay within a reasonable budget. Furthermore, when soliciting for maintenance proposals, do make sure that the contractor has adequate liability, workmans' compensation, and auto insurance. If you hire an uninsured contractor, you may be financially responsible for any injuries or property damages. Ask the contractor to include a certificate of insurance, as well as copies of their licenses and certifications (irrigation, pest control, or tree trimming) with their proposal. Below is a list of the most common landscape maintenance specifications. I could elaborate in depth on each item, but I will just give a brief description.

### **Mowing**

Turfgrass mowing is usually the largest part of the maintenance budget. The cycles of this service could vary widely. Although the ideal cut would be no more than one-third of the blade of grass, this would probably put us to over forty cuts a year. Since St. Augustine is a resilient grass, and for budget purposes, the industry in South Florida uses a thirty-one cut average. It is recommended that mowers use sharp mulching blades to recycle grass clippings for additional nutrient benefits. Usually included with the mowing is the soft and hard edging, as well as line trimming and blowing.

### **Shrub & Bed Maintenance**

At a minimum, once a month hand pruning of shrubs and ground covers, with sharp and proper tools, will ensure the best shape, health, and character of the individual plant. Ground



covers should be selectively cut back monthly to encourage lateral growth and to keep plants in bed boundaries and out of other plantings, walkways, lighting, etc. Each cycle should include raking leaf accumulation in beds and turning over mulch to provide a fresh look. Sucker growth from tree bases, dead limbs, branches, and fronds up to a height of eight feet, or limbs which pose a threat to public safety should be removed on an ongoing basis.

### **Chemical Integrated Pest Management (IPM)**

IPM should be utilized to control pests and disease. This includes a monthly inspection of the

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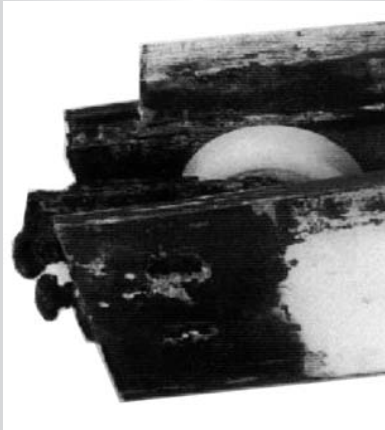
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landscape and curative treatment applied only as necessary. Weeds in beds and other undesirable growth are treated at this time. Often, there are variables that cause decline in the landscape environment; utilize your local county extension office or city landscape departments for assistance.

### Fertilization

Fertilizing supplies nutrients, helps to establish newly planted trees and shrubs, increases health and vigor, and corrects or prevents nutrient deficiencies. Any unusually stressed areas will require a nutrient analysis and the appropriate remediation should be addressed. All shrubs, ground covers, and trees should be fertilized by broadcasting by hand or by a fertilizer blowing machine during the spring, summer, fall, and winter. Shrubs and ground covers fertilized at one and one-half to three pounds of nitrogen per 100 square feet per application with a slow release. Trees and palms at one pound of fertilizer per inch of tree diameter, but no more than eight pounds of fertilizer per tree.

The St. Augustine grass should be fertilized in the spring, summer, fall, and winter with a slow release fertilizer at a rate of one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per application. Weed and feed fertilizer may supplement, if necessary, and is generally applied with the fall or winter fertilizer application. The University of Florida continually tests what nutrients and ratios are best for our tropical environment and this information can be found at their website.

### Irrigation

Irrigation is the most underappreciated part of the landscape maintenance service. The system should be monitored monthly for proper performance and coverage. Clocks are checked, rain gauges adjusted, heads cleaned, and adjustments made. Additional costs as the system ages and the landscape changes occur regularly. It is important to keep your system updated to avoid costly last minute repairs during drought situations.

### Mulch

Mulches are used in conventional landscape to provide many benefits. They are used to beautify plant beds, suppress weeds, modify the soil environment and enhance plant growth. Generally, mulch is applied at least once a year and touched up in high profile areas, as needed.

### Tree Trimming

Trimming of hard wood trees and palms are done annually. The recent years of storms have made us appreciate the necessity of tree trimming. Each county has its own regulations for tree trimming. Contact your local County extension office to be aware of certification and codes that pertain to your area.

Specifications vary and different communities prioritize different services. However, these are the most common specifications I have come across. Make sure contracts go into detail regarding services and list specific areas of concern for your community. By creating a comprehensive specification for your community, your association will be better prepared to choose the right maintenance company.

*Tom Jacob is an ISA certified arborist, certified pest control operator and co-owner of Prestige Property Maintenance in Davie, FL. For more information, visit [www.prestigepmm.com](http://www.prestigepmm.com). ■*

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