

PIP-36 Prepared by **R.G. Bellinger**, Extension Pesticide Coordinator, & **R. Polomski**, Extension Consumer Horticulturist,
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How to Choose a Lawn Care Company

...when you're concerned about lawn care chemicals

Lawns are environmental assets. Turfgrasses protect soils from erosion, cool the environment, increase water's ability to seep into the soil, enhance property values, and make useful recreational surfaces. Their fibrous root systems help enrich the soil.

Many homeowners want attractive, healthy lawns. To accomplish this goal, some people may want or need to hire a lawn care service to do their lawn maintenance. Before you select a lawn care company to maintain your lawn, you need to decide on the level of lawn quality you desire. Why? — because lawn quality is directly related to maintenance. An average quality lawn can be obtained with a minimum of money, time, and effort. An above-average or superior quality lawn, one which has a dense population of lawn grasses and a minimum number of weeds, requires additional care, such as weed, disease, and insect control—and additional money. These services may be included in a lawn care program or may be purchased separately. Whatever level of quality you desire, the final product should be a healthy dense lawn.


Depending on your desired level of lawn quality, you may want a company to apply fertilizers and pesticides—herbicides, insecticides,


and fungicides. On the other hand, lawn care chemicals improve the health and appearance of your lawn, but some people are concerned they may pose a health risk and potentially can harm the environment. Besides a lawn care company's ability to provide a variety of landscape maintenance services, many customers today are increasingly concerned about the safe use of fertilizers and pesticides—herbicides, insecticides, fungicides on their lawns. Pesticides should be used only when needed. If such chemicals will be used, ask the company which ones it will use, why, and when.


In general, it is expected that these health and environmental risks are minimized if these lawn care chemicals are applied by a reputable, trained professional, rather than by a homeowner. Inexperienced homeowners are more likely to make mistakes than lawn care professionals in mixing the right chemical dilutions, calibrating the proper application equipment, employing safety measures to protect the applicator, and properly storing or disposing of containers.

If you choose to have a company meet your level of lawn quality with chemicals, follow these guidelines to help you make an informed choice.

Some guidelines

 Know what lawn or landscape care services you want provided. If you are not sure what level of care or management you want, ask several companies what services they offer. Once you decide what services you want, get several cost estimates from companies who offer these services. Ask neighbors and friends who have had such service for recommendations.

 See if the company is willing to listen to your concerns about your lawn or landscape, and if they can provide effective and acceptable solutions to any lawn care problems you may have. Lawn care companies should have competent personnel who can respond to you.

 Obtain a written service agreement. Ask if the service is automatically renewed each year. If so, request an annual written confirmation. If you choose to cancel your service agreement, ask how and when this must be done and ask if there are any penalties.

Many companies provide a free on-site landscape survey to determine problems, level of maintenance, and pricing. Do not simply accept service over the telephone without other contact with the company. Ask that a company representative visit your property.

🔧 Ask if the company is licensed and insured. Don't be afraid to ask for proof.

🔧 Ask if the company is a member of a trade association, for instance, the Professional Lawn Care Association of America or the South Carolina Landscape & Turfgrass Association. This can be an indication of the company's dedication to good service. Trade associations often have consumer protection codes of ethics to be followed by their members. Also, these associations help keep their members informed of the latest technical information in the industry, as well as keeping members educated in the safe use of pesticides.

🔧 Pesticides and other lawn care chemicals should be used only as needed. Ask the company to tell you what lawn care chemicals it plans to use and why. Some companies will provide you with a copy of the label for pesticides they apply. You should be able to receive one on request.

🔧 A company should always provide advance notice of chemical applications so that lawn furniture, sports equipment, toys, and pet accessories can be removed from the area before treatment. The company should also tell you how long to keep children and pets off the lawn after treatment.

🔧 Ask if the company will put up notification signs after any chemical application. If so, ask who is responsible for removing them and when they should be removed.

🔧 Lawn care chemicals must often be watered into the soil to be effective. Determine if the company will do this, or if you will be responsible. Ask for detailed instructions on the tasks you will need to perform.

🔧 Ask if the individual(s) applying pesticides will be a licensed Commercial Pesticide Applicator or be working under the supervision of one. While this is not required by law in South Carolina for general use pesticides, a Certified Commercial Pesticide Applicator has studied for and passed a licensing examination on the safe use of pesticides.

🔧 Request that the company properly dispose of any fertilizer or pesticide containers.

🔧 Check on the company. A common complaint against some companies is that lawn care chemicals are applied without the knowledge or consent of the homeowner. Other complaints include delays in services and, occasionally, damage to desirable plants with herbicides or chemical applications which may be made on, or drift onto, a neighbor's property.

- 1) Check with the Clemson University Department Pesticide Regulation to see if the company has any pesticide-related violations (864-646-2150 in Pendleton, 803-736-7680 in Columbia, or check your phone book listing under Clemson University, under State Government).
- 2) Check with the Better Business Bureau to see what types of complaints, if any, have been made against the company.
- 3) Ask the company for recent references from local customers.

Using pesticides properly and judiciously can help protect you, your family and neighbors, and the environment especially surface and groundwaters. Pesticide use should be balanced with recognized cultural practices. Such practices include proper grass selection, mowing, watering, fertilization and soil aeration. If you choose to apply lawn care chemicals or other pesticides yourself read the labels and follow the directions exactly.



THE CLEMSON UNIVERSITY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
can provide you with information on how to grow and care for a healthy lawn.
Ask Extension!