

## It's Not Easy Being Green

Susan V. Daywitt

### Curb Appeal is a Big Deal

Prevent landscaping pests from turning your customers away

Curb appeal is vital to all restaurants. After advertising, it's often the first thing a potential customer sees.

Curb appeal is simply how desirable your restaurant looks from the outside. It doesn't matter how good your food is; if the outside of your facility is unkempt, it will keep most customers away. This is especially important for quick-serve restaurants, where impulse decisions drive much of the customer base. You want a landscape that is green, lush and inviting. Uncut grass or fly infestations give the customer the impression that you do not care about the outside of your restaurant; and if you do not care about the outside, then your customers are thinking it's probably unkempt and unclean on the inside.

Customers want to spend their hard-earned dollars at a restaurant that looks crisp and up to par. Although often overlooked, pests can have a huge impact on the curb appeal of your restaurant. While everyone is aware of the dangers of pests inside the kitchen or dining room, pests outside your restaurant can have just as big of an impact on your bottom line.

### Keeping Pests at Bay

Your landscaper is responsible for the aesthetics of your exterior, such as keeping the lawn and bushes trimmed, maintaining any flower beds and fertilizing. He or she is also responsible for ensuring the proper irrigation times. If the landscaper over-irrigates, or irrigates at the wrong times in the wrong weather, he or she could accidentally create an infestation of flies or mosquitoes.

The pest control operator (PCO) is responsible for taking care of any pest outbreaks in a timely manner. And no matter how good your landscaper is, there is always a risk of pests infiltrating your lawn or property. Make sure your landscaper and your PCO have a good working relationship, as a quality lawn depends on how well they coordinate.

The key is to evaluate and diagnose your turf and lawn before the damage goes too far. What do you need to look out for? According to Scott Milnes of DENTCO, look for small patches where grubs are eating away at the turf, or turf that's starting to come up and not remain anchored into the ground. Another sure sign would be brown spots or discoloration in your turf.

If you see evidence of grubs or insects in your turf and you haven't taken any preventive measures to take care of them, you must call your PCO immediately, in order to prevent further damage.

### Coping with an Infestation

The types of pests you may deal with is dependent on the part of the country you live in. Florida, for example, has an awful problem with fire ants, whereas they are nowhere to be seen in Michigan or Ohio. And colder areas of the country might not have any pests for almost half the year, with snow and frozen ground as their main challenge. In the northwest, you are at a greater risk for over-irrigation and subsequent fly infestations.

John Lolmaugh of Jack in the Box puts it this way: "You really have to be specific to the environment of the area you are managing. You have to negotiate with Mother Nature to get the most optimum landscape available in your market."

If the worst happens, and your restaurant's lawn does get a bug infestation, your licensed PCO must take action immediately. This is crucial. Do not simply have an employee go to the local hardware store and pick up what they think will work; it's your responsibility to provide a healthy and safe environment for your guests and employees. Only a licensed PCO can recommend and use the correct government-approved and environmentally safe chemicals for the eradication of pests.

So, let's just say your lawn has actually been infested, how long is the recovery time? You can often achieve pest eradication within a week, but restoring the visual component of your landscape can take anywhere from 30 to 90 days, depending on the degree of the infestation. And in the worst-case scenario, you may have to re-sod the entire lawn. That's why looking for signs is so vital. The easiest way to avoid this problem is to catch it early.

If you want a healthy and inviting restaurant exterior, the key is to establish a partnership with an experienced company that understands landscaping and choosing the right PCO.

"The one thing you must have is a well-designed scope of work that can be easily followed, that is designed with your PCO in mind," Lolmaugh said. "When you go out to bid with a vendor, it's not all about price; it's about scope and price, because as I've found out over the years, you do get what you pay for."

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### Beyond Bugs

3 ways to stop rodents and birds from destroying your lawn

Most people think about grubs and spiders when they think about pests, but gophers, squirrels and birds are just as big of a problem. They can affect your lawn, flower beds and walkways. Bird feces, in particular, can dry and turn to dust, which can then be breathed in and could cause major health problems. Luckily, there are some simple fixes you can implement quickly that don't involve poisons or traps:

#### 1) Remove anything that signals territory.

Make sure your roof and lawn are free of any nests, droppings, dead birds or rodents that could signal to an animal that the area is their territory. The main goal isn't to kill these pests; it is to make sure your facility and its surrounding areas aren't a place that rodents or birds want to be.

#### 2) Remove trees that touch the building.

An often overlooked way for pests or rodents to infiltrate the restaurant is through overhanging tree branches that touch the roof of the restaurant or are growing into the building. Always make sure your landscaper prunes errant branches.

"The biggest risk in landscaping is rodents, believe it or not," said Bill Brady, Director of Facilities with Smokey Bones Bar & Fire Grill. "Roof rats to be specific, followed by raccoons. The most important thing a restaurant can do is to make sure no trees or bushes are touching the building. Giving any pathway for a rodent into your space is dangerous. Placing bait stations outside the perimeter and making sure all exterior doors have good weather stripping is key to keeping your restaurant pest free."

Brady said his team had this issue in Clearwater, Fla., once. They removed the trees in front of the overhang roof and replaced them with pleasing plants for the clients. "It definitely increased the aesthetic value of the property and kept us away from using rodenticides or snap traps, which can be lethal," he said.

3) Remove trash bags from near your building.

Raccoons easily access roofs by climbing downspouts and trees. They become a nuisance by destroying landscapes, raiding trash dumpsters and occupying restaurant establishments. Do not leave bags of food outside, and be sure to close the lid to your dumpsters. Nothing is scarier than opening the lid of a dumpster and out pops a raccoon, which may or may not be sick. The best way to get rid of a raccoon is to simply take away its food source.