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## Selecting A Lawn Care Company

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Using a lawn care company offers a viable option to maintaining your lawn yourself.

As a homeowner, you must care for your lawn. Proper lawn care includes mowing, fertilizer/pest control, cultivation, irrigation and overseeding. You have the option of doing all these tasks or you may choose to hire any or all of them done.

One benefit of doing so is that you are able to shift some or all of the responsibility to a lawn care service and, in turn, increase your own leisure time.

Lawn care companies provide a service to their customers. The degree of service varies from firm to firm with some offering only fertilizer/pest control and others complete turf maintenance.

Most lawn care companies are more familiar with current developments in fertilizer and pest technology than homeowners. A responsible firm holds in-house training sessions and encourages its employees to attend classes and educational seminars conducted by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension and/or the Nebraska Professional Lawn Care Association.

Various levels of service are available from lawn care companies and each carries with it a certain degree of performance or results. A homeowner who selects a program with four pest control/fertilizer applications per year can expect insect, disease and other problems to arise periodically. When a homeowner chooses a complete lawn care service, a representative from the firm works on the lawn every week, normally resulting in a minimum of problems. Such full service is sometimes referred to as gardener service.

Lawn care companies cannot perform miracles. Most conflicts between homeowners and companies stem from a miscommunication over services to be provided or unrealistic expectations about the results to be achieved. This is especially true when a homeowner wants a “picture perfect” lawn.

When a lawn care company is involved, lawn maintenance includes three factors which must work with the others to produce an attractive and functional turf. The homeowner must properly water and mow the turf. Nature must provide good growing conditions. When temperature, precipitation and humidity fall out of the optimal range, problems may arise.

Finally, the lawn care company must properly apply fertilizer, diagnose insect and disease problems and control weeds.

With lawn care services, as with most things in life, you get what you pay for. This does not necessarily mean that the most expensive firm is the best, but you must consider that quality materials and trained employees do not come without expense. If a quoted price sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

The average “do it yourself” homeowner spends \$100–\$150 per year on basic lawn maintenance products (i.e. fertilizer and pest control products). This figure doesn’t include the cost of a lawn mower, fertilizer spreader, watering equipment or the labor to service the lawn. A reasonable price for lawn care would range between \$300 and \$500 a year, depending on the level of service provided (i.e. is grub control included, number of applications etc.), and the expectations of the homeowner. This estimate is based on chemical/fertility applications only and does not include other services such as mowing or snow removal.

### Selection Factors

When choosing a lawn care company, consider the following:

**Flexibility.** Does the company offer different programs for different turf species grown and level of services desired? What products are used? Are there alternatives to programs used? Does the lawn care company offer various payment options?

**Response.** How quickly will a technical representative inspect a potential lawn problem? How soon can remedial steps be taken?

**Expertise Level.** Are company employees licensed by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture to apply restricted use products? Is the lawn care company a member of Nebraska Professional Lawn Care Association, Professional Lawn Care Association of America, or Nebraska Turfgrass Foundation? Do the employees regularly attend training by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln or community colleges? Do the employees or owners have certificates or diplomas from technical schools or universities?

**SELECTION CRITERIA  
(Example)**

| <i>Company</i> | <i>Flexibility</i> | <i>Response to Inquiry</i> | <i>Expertise Level</i> | <i>Reputation</i> | <i>Range of Services</i>   | <i>Price</i> |
|----------------|--------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| A              | good               | good                       | just beginning         | uncertain         | full                       | \$230/yr.    |
| B              | average            | 2-4 days                   | good                   | average           | fertilizers and pesticides | \$199/yr.    |
| C              | excellent          | 1 day                      | outstanding            | great             | full                       | \$290/yr.    |
| D              | poor               | 2-3 days                   | uncertain              | average           | fertilizers                | \$150/yr.    |

**SELECTION CRITERIA  
(Homeowner Worksheet)**

| <i>Company</i> | <i>Flexibility</i> | <i>Response to Inquiry</i> | <i>Expertise Level</i> | <i>Reputation</i> | <i>Range of Services</i> | <i>Price</i> |
|----------------|--------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
|                |                    |                            |                        |                   |                          |              |
|                |                    |                            |                        |                   |                          |              |
|                |                    |                            |                        |                   |                          |              |
|                |                    |                            |                        |                   |                          |              |

**Reputation.** How long has the lawn care company been doing business locally? What do other customers say about their service? Is the lawn care firm willing to accept the views of an unbiased party if problems arise? You may wish to ask the lawn care firm for names and addresses of satisfied customers as references. The Better Business Bureau may also be able to help. Have you seen the company working in your neighborhood? If so, how do equipment and personnel appear?

Using the Selection Criteria chart should make it easier to select a lawn care company.

Most problems or disputes between the homeowner and the lawn care company can be prevented by each party fulfilling their responsibility and understanding the role that nature plays in producing a satisfactory turfgrass.

When problems arise, contact the service manager of the lawn care company. State the problem as clearly as possible and ask how soon a technical representative can investigate the situation.

Ultimately, you are responsible for the maintenance of your lawn. Lawn care companies can perform some of the necessary tasks but you shouldn't expect miracles from companies. Good communication between the homeowner and the company is essential for proper turf management.

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