

A New Approach to Turf Maintenance



Source: www.TurfMagazine.com

Golf course experience helps this landscaper approach residential lawns with a different eye

When EcoGreen Landscaping customers in Charlotte, N.C., get landscape maintenance done on their properties, they're getting the benefit of the experience that Paul Driedger, company owner, acquired while working as a special projects manager for The Golf Course at Echo Falls. Driedger's background includes working on his family's tree farm, earning a business degree, working in field propagation and also spending several years in the golf course industry. He brings that experience to the residential landscape maintenance company he started five years ago where he has taken a keen interest in helping his residential clients' yards look as attractive as a golf course landscape. "My experience in golf courses has helped me tremendously in getting a new perspective on how to view turf maintenance in general," says Driedger. "The way we maintain a golf course is entirely different from the approach of what has historically been the case with residential. I learned a tremendous amount working on a golf course when it comes to taking turf maintenance to a higher level." Driedger says that all of his life experiences have "enabled me to set myself apart from the competition by looking at landscaping maintenance in a different way than the average landscape company."



Paul Driedger, owner of EcoGreen Landscaping.
PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL DRIEDGER.

Driedger credits Echo Falls' Golf Course Superintendent Jason Otto for inspiring him. "He had a good approach to taking care of grass and maintaining it at a high level," he says. "Working with him for five years really influenced the way that I approach turf maintenance and changed my direction."

With another employee, Driedger services the Charlotte area, and EcoGreen's

primary service is landscape maintenance. "I take a holistic approach to landscaping," Driedger says. "When I go into someone's yard, I look at what type of grass they use, what kind of trees and shrubs are in the yard, what kind of soil, what their irrigation system is like – I'm looking for ways to make everything more efficient and to get the most for them out of what they have so they don't have to use extra amounts of water to keep the landscape alive. I'm looking at drought-resistant plants in drier areas. I'm looking at the grass that will conserve water using Moisture Manager. In everything I do, I'm looking at making everything run more efficiently so we get more out of our products." Moisture Manager is a liquid blend of hygroscopic and humectant combined with a naturally derived, non-ionic wetting agent to help reduce water consumption.



This bed filled with summer annuals was designed by Paul Driedger for The Golf Course at Echo Falls in Snohomish, Wash. Driedger used his experience at the golf course to take residential turf maintenance to the next level.
PHOTO BY JASON OTTO.

Working on golf courses entails a comprehensive approach that includes maintaining the health of the grass, the health of the soil, irrigation patterns, fertilization, nutrients and planting the proper trees and plants to complement the turf. As such, Driedger says that experience has helped him look at residential lawns in a way that may be different from other lawn maintenance companies. "I end up doing things like topdressing, which has been very prominent on golf courses. I use Moisture Manager and products like that, which are common on golf courses, but you rarely see used in residential maintenance," he says.

Water conservation is becoming more of an issue every year, Driedger points out. "The last few years has been unusually dry and warm, so the premium on water has definitely gotten higher," he says. "Not only are people limited in the amount of water they use, but it's becoming more expensive, so utilizing products that allow people's irrigation to go further helps in multiple ways on keeping the grass healthy and also keeping their costs down."

Residential property owners are also looking for higher levels of maintenance these days, Driedger notes. "While brown patches have been historically acceptable on the average residential lawn, it's not so much anymore," he says. "People want to see the level of maintenance that they see on a golf course. That's when it helps to have that golf course experience. I know exactly how to get more from a medium level of maintenance to a higher golf course level of maintenance."

Driedger provides different levels of service. For some clients, he provides full-time property management, coordinating services provided by numerous service providers, such as pool service, window washing, gutter cleaning, painters and light specialists. For other clients, he is on call to help with design projects or disease or insect issues. For most clients, he designs a year-long maintenance and design program. Driedger makes it a point to customize clients' landscape plans and maintenance programs according to the property's soil analysis. "People value having someone provide them with

individual service that's customized for their own yard," he notes.

Driedger began taking an interest in landscape management when he worked on his family's tree farm. "That gave me an eye for trees and plants and grass, not only for design, but to see what is healthy, what kind of issues you have to deal with, how to deal with them and how to get the most of what you have as far as the health of the material you have," he says. "It gave me a view into the whole agricultural aspect of life and it gave me an interest in learning more about it the biology of it – the way that trees, plants and grass are all maintained."

Driedger named his company EcoGreen to represent his commitment to helping clients' yards look healthy through factoring in environmental concerns. The idea came from his fiancé, Julie Jespersen, who threw it out during a discussion on what the name should be.



Paul Driedger designed this flower bed to show that spring is in full-swing.
PHOTO BY PAUL DRIEDGER.

He takes more of a hybrid approach to lawn maintenance, using chemicals only as needed. "The way I view it is that in a lot of the issues with pests that we deal with, we are going to be friendlier to the environment if we keep it under control from the get-go," Driedger says. "What I try to do is focus more on preventative measures. That way I can be using chemicals at lower rates and keep things under control rather than have a problem get out of control and then have to end up using more chemicals and pesticides at higher rates and having to remove plants and grass. I also want to use products that allow people to use less water. That's also very important for the environment."

Driedger says his favorite piece of equipment is a 200-gallon spray tank that's helped to make lawn maintenance more efficient. "It's given me the capability of doing all of my turf applications in liquid, which is more efficient and that helps tremendously, because when I'm looking at doing an application, I can use different products all at once," he says. "It allows me to pinpoint the areas where they need higher amounts of nutrients, so I can make customized mixes based on the analysis of people's yards."

After the past couple of years of tight budgets, Driedger is starting to notice clients are becoming more receptive to doing higher-end lawn care and improve their properties. "With water being at a higher premium, people have been very interested in reducing the cost of their water bill by using Moisture Manager," he says. "That's been a really big hit so far. It's easy for me, because I'm primarily doing liquid applications and Moisture Manager is easy to apply." Industrywide, Driedger notes a general trend toward a higher level of maintenance. "People seem more inclined to want their lawn to look like a golf course," he says.

While Driedger has taken on a commercial client, he plans to keep his focus on the high-end residential market. Five years from now, he'd like to have about 250 customers and assume a greater market share of the higher-end

neighborhoods in south Charlotte.

Driedger says his biggest challenge is the competition. "There are hundreds of landscape companies in the Charlotte area, so the biggest challenge is for me to put my name out there while maintaining the position I want to have as far as communicating my message to people of doing higher-end landscape and superior service."

Carol Brzozowski is a member of the Society of Environmental Journalists and has written extensively about environmental issues for numerous trade journals for more than a decade. She resides in Coral Springs, Fla.