



Engaging Commercial Horticulture Professionals to Understand Why Landscapes Fail

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Commercial horticulture professionals performing maintenance on properties often inherit poorly performing landscapes. Poor performance is defined as a landscape that is difficult or impossible to maintain using standard maintenance and best management practices. In many cases professionals do not understand why managed landscapes fail and may resort to pesticide or fertilizer applications or improper cultural practices to attempt to solve an unknown problem. A program that provides classroom and field training to educate professionals on underlying causes of landscape failures was developed. Presentations were developed for general landscape and trees, turfgrass, and palms to address issues encountered in urban development, regulatory and design compromises, improper plant and irrigation installation, wrong plant/wrong place, nutritional deficiencies, and unusual pests that affect long term landscape success. Presentations include *Why Landscapes Fail*, *Why Turfgrass Fails*, and *Why Palms Fail*. Presentations are supplemented with fact sheets that address specific issues, planting guides, irrigation audit forms, and soil test information. Field evaluations and on-site training at poorly performing landscapes are scheduled as requested by landscape professionals. Although designed for commercial professionals, this program can be utilized for residential and Master Gardener training.

Program Objectives

1. Define landscape failure.
2. Provide education on underlying development and construction issues that may contribute to landscape failures.
3. Provide education on landscape principles that may contribute to landscape failures, including soil, design, right plant/right place, plant and irrigation installation, and post installation maintenance.
4. Provide training materials in a variety of educational formats, including classroom training, fact sheets, magazine articles, brochures, checklists and field training, to meet differing learning styles.

Methods

The target audience was identified as commercial horticulture professionals. These professionals most commonly inherit landscape management problems when accepting new maintenance contracts, although some professionals were involved at the inception of landscape installation. Three years of site visits and personal interviews revealed a trend of common landscape problems, including turfgrass, tree, palm, and general landscape failure to thrive. In most cases, standard maintenance practices and adoption of best management practices failed to result in landscapes that performed as expected by landscape professionals and their clientele. As a result, landscape professionals may resort to increased chemical intervention to solve landscape problems.

Landscape failure is defined as the time when it becomes difficult or impossible to maintain a quality appearance using standard maintenance and best management practices alone. Landscape professionals should not assume that everything possible was done during property development to ensure a successful landscape, or that standard maintenance and best management practices will ensure successful landscapes.

This program teaches landscape professionals to consider how development issues, such as tight budgets and deadlines, fill dirt and soil conditions, and construction activities, impact the long-term success of landscapes. Landscape and irrigation design, sod, plant and tree quality, installation practices, and post installation maintenance practices are also considered as potential contributors to landscape failures.

Three PowerPoint presentations were developed: *Why Landscapes Fail*, *Why Turfgrass Fails*, and *What's Wrong with My Palm*. A series of fact sheets and articles were published on topics such as: *Why Landscapes Fail*, *Why Turfgrass Fails*, *Why Trees Fail: Tips on Tip Dieback*, and *Pruning Palms the Healthy Way*. A tree planting guide was published in English and Spanish, a brochure was published on *Diagnosing and Correcting Palm Nutritional Disorders* and an irrigation audit worksheet was published. The program materials address the underlying causes of landscape failures and highlight the importance of proper site preparation and landscape installation practices, and also correcting underlying problems to improve long-term landscape success. Program materials stress that problems such as pest pressures and nutritional deficiencies that result from underlying problems can not be resolved with additional fertilizers and pesticides. Program materials introduce integrated landscape management, which emphasizes that landscape problems must be solved by considering all facets of landscape development and stresses that fertilizers

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and pesticides should not be used to solve landscape problems that are not related to disease or plant nutrition.

Learning opportunities were made available via traditional classroom presentations at UF/IFAS Extension offices and point-of-purchase business locations. Fact sheets, brochures, and guides were distributed as hardcopies from the office, point-of-purchase business locations and via email and website posting. Educational site visits were offered to professionals requiring on-site consultations to diagnose landscape failures.

Results

As a result of this program 100% of participants indicated on post program surveys that the information presented was very useful. Ninety-six percent indicated that knowledge gained will lead to a change or improvement in present practices. More than 2000 publications have been distributed. Requests for site visit consultations have increased 16%. Educating landscape professionals to consider and correct underlying site and installation issues improves the long-term success of urban landscapes.