

Seven Things to Know Before Choosing a Lawn Care Service

Introduction

Managing your lawn and grounds is certainly something that you can do on your own, and it is something that many people choose to do. For a lot of people, maintaining their own lawn is an enjoyable experience. It can also be a source of pride to keep your property looking healthy and lush by yourself. But this may not be the case for everyone.

For many people, the idea of spending hours cutting grass, picking weeds and laying down fertilizer is not something they look forward to. After all, yard work is just that- work! It takes time, effort, money and, depending on the size of your property, a good amount of physical labor. For some people this is not something they are interested in doing week after week. That is why there are so many professional and non-professional lawn care service companies out there.

Professional lawn service companies are actual licensed companies who can provide a variety of lawn care services, including grass mowing, weed control, edging, garden and flower maintenance and chemical applications. Professional lawn service companies can be either large or small. Non-professional lawn care services are generally people who make a few extra bucks on the side helping people with lawn maintenance. A good example of this is the local neighborhood kid who cuts lawns for money.

There is quite a difference between professional and non-professional lawn care services- which one you will want to choose to use will depend on your specific situation. For the majority of people a professional lawn care service will be the best course of action. Not all lawn care service companies are created equal however. Some companies are better than others and not all companies can provide the appropriate level of service. Since you will be spending your hard-earned cash on these services you will want to make sure that you receive the level of quality service you deserve.

Here is everything you **must** know *before* you hire a lawn care service company.

Do You Need the Services of a Lawn Care Company?

Hiring a professional lawn care service to manage your property has several advantages. If you choose to take care of your own lawn and gardens you may get the satisfaction of doing the job yourself, but you will also spend a great deal of time and effort to get those results. By hiring a company you are effectively freeing up your time and saving some of your energy. A lawn service company may also offer more advantages.

Here are some of the advantages to hiring a lawn care service:

- **Lawn care companies offer a very valuable service.**

Most lawn care services offer continuous maintenance for your property. This means that you don't have to do anything but sit back and enjoy your well-groomed lawn. These companies will come to your property on a regular schedule and provide season-specific maintenance. This helps ensure that your lawn and gardens look great all year long. All of this is provided without you having to start a lawnmower, move mulch or apply fertilizer. This saves you both effort and time, meaning you can focus on other, possibly more enjoyable things. Lawn care services are especially helpful for people with busy schedules.

- **Lawn care companies can offer valuable expertise.**

A professional lawn service should have a great deal of knowledge and experience when it comes to the proper maintenance of lawns and gardens. They know what it takes to keep a lawn and garden looking great all year long. This expertise can include, but is not limited to: proper mowing techniques, using the right types and amounts of feed and fertilizer, avoiding damaging plants, knowing how different kinds of plants grow, knowing which flowers will look the best during specific times of the year, understanding how to best control pests, deciding when to water and how much to water and more. Essentially, they are experts in making your property look great.

- **Lawn care companies provide their own equipment and materials.**

If you choose to maintain your own property you are going to need a good deal of equipment and lawn care materials. This can include mowers, weed-whackers, fertilizer spreaders, watering apparatuses and other forms of lawn equipment. It may also include bags of fertilizers, feeds and pest control substances. Not only will you be responsible for purchasing these products, but you will also be in charge of maintaining them. Many of these types of lawn care equipment require the use of motors, meaning that you will also have to do a little engine maintenance and purchase fuel. Don't forget you will also be required to store all of this equipment on your

property. Remember that certain types of pesticides and fertilizers require specific storage requirements under the law to prevent accidental ingestion and leakage.

A professional lawn care service will provide all of these materials for you, and you won't have to store them. A good lawn service will have large and efficient mowers, quality edge-control devices and an efficient way to spread fertilizers and pest-control products. They will be in charge of maintaining this equipment and purchasing new materials when necessary. They will know how to properly calibrate the necessary spreaders and sprayers and how to properly dispose of lawn care chemicals according to the law. This eliminates the need for you to spend even more of your time and effort on procuring and maintaining the right tools for the job.

- **Lawn care services take away some of the risks associated with maintaining your own lawn.**

While the risks associated with maintaining your property yourself are relatively low, there are still some things that could go wrong. For example, most equipment used to maintain lawns have sharp cutting edges and lots of moving parts. It is not unheard of for people to lose body parts to their lawn mowers or tractors. Also, many types of lawn care equipment require the use of gasoline or electricity to operate, which also presents some risks of fire and burns. In addition to that, many of the various types of pest control and fertilizer products use chemicals that may be harmful to humans and animals. Improper application procedures or using the wrong amounts of these chemicals can harm people, domestic animals and the environment.

Professional lawn care services will handle all of these risks for you. They have the expertise required to avoid chemical and equipment troubles. They can help safeguard you, your family, your pets, your neighbors and the environment.

- **Professional lawn companies have access to better types of pest and weed control products.**

There are pesticides and weed-control products that are labeled for home-owner use and there are chemicals that require a permit to safely use. A professional lawn care service may be able to offer you access to a better range of products to control weeds and pests around your home. They will also know how to best use these chemicals and how to safely dispose of them. This can be especially helpful if your property is dealing with very large amounts of weeds or pests that don't seem to respond to house-hold use chemicals.

Disadvantages to Using a Lawn Care Service

There may also be some disadvantages to hiring a professional lawn care service to manage your property. The most obvious disadvantage is their cost. Lawn services cost money, especially if you want year-round maintenance. Some people find the advantages of hiring a lawn service to be well worth the costs, but you will have to determine this based on your personal budget.

There are a few other disadvantages to hiring a lawn care company to work on your property, but the severity of these disadvantages will vary depending on the requirements of each individual customer. For example, some people think that having strangers come on to their property to cut the lawn and apply chemicals is a downside, while others may not mind it. Other people may really enjoy working outdoors on their property and would miss it if they hired someone else to do it. Some people may worry that a team of lawn guys may impede their personal space or provide a problem for their children or pets. Again, whether or not these things constitute a disadvantage will depend on your needs and desires.

Another potential downside to hiring a company to manage your property is that you will be serviced according to the company's schedule, not yours. Depending on the size of the company and how many other clients they are serving, you may not get maintenance when you want it. For example, if you are having party this weekend and you want your lawn and gardens to look great for it, you may be upset if your regularly scheduled lawn cutting didn't happen this week. Many companies are flexible to the requirements of their clients, but some are busy and can only offer maintenance when they have the time.

Finding a Lawn Care Service in Your Area

Locating a lawn service company that operates in your area is very easy. You may be able to think of a few companies right off the bat, or you may have to do a little bit of research. Because these are service companies, you will want to take the time to choose the best company for your specific needs. Therefore, it is recommended that you start by making a list of 4 or 5 potential choices and then perform a bit of research to make sure that you choose the best one.

Here are ways to locate potential lawn care services for your list:

- **Recommendations and referrals**

These are probably the best way to find local lawn care services because they already have a positive reputation from people you can trust. Odds are you know someone who uses a lawn

care service. Ask your family, neighbors and friends if they are happy with their lawn care service company and if they would recommend them to you. Ask about the services they receive, including the price and the customer service aspects. Find out how they heard about this particular company and how long they have been using it. You may be able to find all 4 or 5 potential choices from recommendations alone!

- **Online searches**

The internet makes searching for potential lawn care services very easy. Simply type something like 'lawn care services' or 'lawn maintenance' plus your zip code or town name into a major search engine such as Bing or Google, and odds are you will get a few dozen results. Very often this online search will also provide you with links to the company's website, where you can find out more information.

- **Online consumer review websites**

There are several online consumer review websites that can point you towards a good lawn care service. Many of these websites allow consumers to leave feedback regarding service companies they have used in the past, and since no company can pay to be on the site you can be sure these reviews are honest and unbiased. Most of these sites will allow you to type in your local region or zip code in order to locate companies that operate in your area. One of the best nation-wide online consumer review websites is AngiesList.com.

- **Advice from other professionals**

You can often find out information about lawn care services by asking other professionals in the industry. For example, you could go to your local lawn supply store and ask an employee if they know of any good lawn care companies. If you happen to see a property or store location that has a very well-maintained lawn you could always ask the owner which service they use.

You can search for lawn care trade associations on the web to find out more information as well. A simple Google search will return a number of both national and locally-based trade associations for lawn care professionals. Just a few examples of some of these trade associations includes the American Nursery and Landscape Association (ANLA, www.anla.org), the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA, www.alsa.org), the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA, www.plcaa.org), the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS, www.pgms.org), and the Professional Land Care Network (PLANET, www.landcarenetwork.com). All of these trade associations can offer recommendations and advice for anyone looking to locate a good lawn care service.

- **The local Better Business Bureau or Chamber of Commerce**

Both your local Better Business Bureau (BBB) and Chamber of Commerce will be able to offer you information regarding local lawn care service companies. You can find out if the company has ever had a complaint lodged against it and how long each company has been operating in your area.

- **Traditional advertising**

Since you will be performing additional research before you make your final decision, there is nothing wrong with locating companies for your potential list through traditional advertising. Traditional advertising can mean ads on TV, in print, over the radio, on flyers, on billboards and on signs. Many companies will advertise themselves through these methods. You may even be able to think of a few ads right now.

Potential Problems

Not all lawn care services are created equal. Some companies will do a much better job than others. This is why you will want to do some research on each of the companies on your list of potentials *before* you make your final decision. You will want to interview each company and check up on their reputation in order to prevent some of the potential problems that may occur if you make the wrong choice.

Here are just some of the potential problems that could arise from choosing a low-quality lawn care service:

- **Shoddy work**

Professional lawn care companies understand the proper ways to manage plants and properties. They know how to properly cut grass to make it look good, how to apply weed and pest control chemicals and how to keep flowers and other plants healthy. However, a less-than-quality lawn care service company may end up doing a shoddy job on your property, resulting in a bad appearance or dead plants.

- **Overpriced work**

The goal of hiring any lawn care service is to receive great service for the right price. If you hire a low-quality company you may end up paying too much for poor service. No one likes to waste money.

- **Damage to your property**

High-quality lawn care services take responsibility for their actions and take the appropriate steps to ensure that no damage to your property occurs. Low-quality companies don't care about property damage. If you don't want your best flowers accidentally cut down, or your sprinkler system to be damaged or a rock thrown from lawn equipment through your car window, then be sure to hire a reputable company. Reputable companies take steps to keep your property safe and take responsibility if something bad does happen. Low-quality lawn services damage your stuff and just drive away.

- **Lack of scheduled maintenance**

One of the main reasons why people choose to hire a lawn care service is so their property always looks good, all year long. If you hire a low-quality lawn service you may not receive the scheduled maintenance you are paying for, which could result in an unkempt yard. Some less-than-reputable lawn services will take your money and tell you they will be there once a week, only to show up once every month or so. Since you will be paying for regular maintenance it is important that you actually receive regular maintenance.

- **Lack of courtesy and respect**

Reputable lawn services make sure that all of their employees treat both you and your property with courtesy and respect. Reputable companies also focus on providing good customer service. Low-quality lawn services treat you poorly, and no one likes that.

- **Theft or worse**

High-quality lawn care services hire safe and reliable employees. Good companies have rules and procedures that ensure that the people coming onto your property are safe and trustworthy. Anytime a stranger walks onto your land you could be at risk for theft or other types of crime. If you are like most people, then the health and safety of you and your family is very important. Therefore, it is vital that you take the time to ensure that only reputable people are allowed to come near your home and your family.

- **Liability**

Anytime anyone steps onto your property you must consider liability. Who would be responsible if someone injured themselves while working on your property? Who would be responsible if someone injured you or damaged your property while they were working on it? Reputable lawn care services are covered by liability insurance. A lack of insurance is simply a risk that you cannot afford to take!

What to Look For in a Lawn Care Service

In order to avoid these potential problems you will want to look for certain things when you are performing research on your list of potential candidates. First you will want to research each company on your potentials list, and then you will want to interview a representative from each company *before* you make a final decision. This process may be time-consuming, but as you can see from the list of potential problems that could occur, it will be worth your time and effort in the long run.

Here are some things you will want to look for when researching potential lawn care services:

- **A good reputation**

Check with a few sources to determine the company's reputation. You can check with an online consumer review website, with the Better Business Bureau, with the Chamber of Commerce in your area and with previous customers of the company for clues about their reputation. Keep in mind that it is impossible to satisfy each and every customer 100% of the time, so 1 or 2 negative reviews may be okay. Stay away from lawn care services with lots of negative reviews and any that have had an official complaint filed against them.

- **Proper insurance and licenses to operate in your state**

Different states have different licensing requirements for lawn care companies. You will want to find out what your state's specific laws requiring licenses are. (Check with your State Agricultural Department or State Contractors' Board) **Never** hire a lawn care service that cannot show you proof of their licenses and insurance. Insurance is just as important. Also, many states require special licenses, training or permits to use certain chemicals. It is a good idea to find out this information from the company as well.

- **Membership with a professional trade organization**

This is not 100% necessary, but membership in a trade organization shows that a lawn care service cares enough to stay informed and educated about their industry. If a service belongs to one of these organizations odds are they are up to date with recent trends, techniques and safety standards.

- **Good customer service**

Obviously you will want to hire a lawn care service with a record of positive customer service. If there is a problem you will want to know that you can talk to someone about it and get it resolved. You also want to figure out a good schedule of service that will match your

requirements. You will want to make sure that your experience with this company will be a pleasant one.

- **The ability to offer testimonials**

A good lawn care service will be willing to offer you testimonials given by other satisfied customers. If the company is really a good one, then they should have a list of satisfied clients, some of which who will be willing to share their positive experience with others. Again, this may not be 100% necessary to finding a good company, but it certainly can't hurt to choose a company that offers a list of previously satisfied and happy customers.

Questions to Ask

At this point you have a list of 4-5 potential lawn care service companies and you have done a little research to find out how reputable and successful each one is. Now you are ready to begin interviewing the best candidates for the job. Cross off any companies on your list that do not meet the above requirements. Then call up a representative from each company still remaining and ask for a consultation. Most reputable lawn care services will offer a free consultation and estimate. Avoid any company that offers you an estimate without seeing your property first.

Before you can create your list of questions to ask the company's representative, it is a good idea to figure out exactly what services you are looking to obtain. Do you just want your grass cut once a week or so? Or do you want mowing, fertilizing, watering, edging, hedge trimming, lawn aeration, mulching and pest-control services too? Will you also need gardening and flower services? Do you want your entire yard to be maintained or just a section of it? Do you want organic weed control and lawn feeding methods or are you okay with using chemicals? Having a clear understanding of the services you will require will make it much easier to convey this information to the company's representative. Once you have this you are ready to begin asking some questions.

Here are some questions you will want to ask any lawn care service *before* you choose to hire them:

1. **What services does your company offer?**

Not all lawn care services can provide the same types of maintenance. Some can only handle mowing and edging lawns, while others can do everything from irrigation to pest control. You already know what services you want- now you have to make sure that the company you want to hire can provide them for you. It may be helpful to see a print out or menu of the company's offered services.

2. **Do you offer individual services a la carte or do I have to buy a package?**

Some companies will allow you to pick which specific services you want and pay for them individually, while others require that you purchase a package deal. Again, whether you want just a few services or a comprehensive plan will be determined by your specific lawn care requirements and your budget.

3. **Who will be actually doing the work and what are their qualifications?**

You want to know who will actually be in charge of maintaining your property. This means you will want to know who will be on your land and who will be supervising them. Ask if the company requires any special employee training and if they perform background checks. Ask how they will ensure the safety of your property. It may be a good idea to make sure that someone on the crew will always be able to communicate with you, as different languages are often spoken on lawn care crews. Ask who you would have to go to if a specific problem occurred with one of their employees. The more information you can find out about the company's employees- the better!

4. **Are you and your employees fully insured and licensed by the state? Can I see proof?**

Obviously the answers to both of these questions should be yes! Avoid any lawn care service that refuses to show you documented proof of their insurance coverage and license documents.

5. **Do you offer any guarantees?**

What happens if you do not receive the service you want from this company? You will want to know exactly how the company plans on dealing with potential problems or disagreements. You want to know exactly how the company will ensure that you are fully satisfied with their provided services *before* any work begins. You also want to be aware of how you will go about reporting a problem and who specifically you will be speaking to about it.

6. **Will we be signing a contract?**

Always sign a contract with a lawn care service *before* any work begins on your property. Make sure that the contract clearly states what specific services are to be performed, when they are to be performed and how much the cost will be. Make sure it states any guarantees the company offers and how the company will handle any changes to service that you want to make. Make sure you review the contract so that you fully understand any penalties, introductory offers, special promotions, restrictions, fees, special circumstances, taxes, subtractions, discounts and anything else that might be in the fine print.

Know in advance whether you will be expected to pay for materials such as fertilizer and other chemicals or if the company will be picking up the bill. Know how long the company will be offering you their services. Do they offer year round services or seasonal services? Will the company be in charge of disposing of refuse or will that be up to you? How will the company notify you if they will be changing their schedule or services? How will they alter their schedule in the case of bad weather? Be sure that you understand how you will be making payments to the company and when you will be making them.

A contract should read like step-by-step instructions. It should clearly state what the lawn care service's responsibilities are and what it is **not** responsible for. **Don't** sign a contract until you are 100% satisfied that it features everything you require and that you fully understand everything in it.

7. How will you determine the price for your services?

Take a look at the variables that will determine how the lawn care service quotes a rate for your property. These variables can include the size of your property, different obstacles, its location and services to be rendered. It is important that you understand as much as possible regarding how the company intends to charge you based on your variables to make sure that you are indeed getting a fair price. Remember that you can always compare different companies' estimates with one another.

8. Will you provide a free estimate?

Again, the answer to this should be yes! Make sure that the estimate includes all of the variables, the price for each service and when payment would be required.

9. How long have you been in business in this area?

A new lawn care service might be able to offer great service, so you may not want to discount a particular company just because it is new. However, the longer a company has been operating in your area, the better the chance that they will do a good job. This is because low-quality companies typically don't stay in business in the same location for long.

The answers to these questions will go a long way towards helping you choose the right lawn care service for your needs. Once you have gone through these questions with several potential companies, you can then compare the answers and the estimates side by side to determine who is most likely to offer the best service. Your decision will be based on several factors, including more than just the price. Choose a company that is experienced, reliable and who offers good customer service. Go with your gut! If a company doesn't feel right- then pick another one.

Preparing Your Property for Your Lawn Care Service

Once you have made your decision and picked the right lawn care service for the job, the last step is to sign a contract so that work can begin on your property. There are a few things that you can do to prepare your property for your lawn care service. Doing so will make the entire process go more smoothly.

Here are some things you can do make sure your property is managed properly:

- Keep the areas of your property that the crew will working on clean and free from debris. This means picking up all dog and children's toys and giving the crew room to work by removing playing kids and barking dogs.
- Make sure that the crew knows where they can park their vehicles in advance.
- Make sure the crew knows in advance about any special requires your property may have. This can include making sure to close any gates, watching out for the dog or not blocking the driveway.
- Always treat the crew with respect. Remember that they are professionals that you have hired to provide a particular service. They are **not** your employees that you can boss around. If you have a specific problem then speak with the designated supervisor on site. If that doesn't work you should make a phone call to the company.
- Remember that the crew is probably under a tight schedule. This means that you may not want to distract them or take up too much of their time. It is nice to be neighborly and offer to speak with the crew or even offer them a cool drink, but odds are they won't have much time to converse with you.
- Try to stay out of the crew's way so that they can do their job properly.
- Report any problems with property damage, theft or injury to the company right away!

Checklist for Choosing a Lawn Care Service

- ✓ Determine if hiring a professional lawn care service is right for your specific property and your budget.
- ✓ Using a number of different sources, including recommendations from your friends, neighbors, family and other professionals, traditional advertising and online searches to make a list of 4-5 potential choices.
- ✓ Perform some additional research on your list of potentials, including finding out information regarding the company's reputation, their location, what services they offer and if they have any official complaints lodged against them.
- ✓ Call up each company and request a consultation and interview. Ask the company's representative your questions to find out more information. Ask for an estimate and discuss any special considerations you may have. Make sure the company is fully insured and licensed by your state.
- ✓ Compare your different interview answers and price estimates with one another to determine who the best candidate for your specific requirements is.
- ✓ Choose a lawn care service based on their reputation, their services, their customer service and their price.
- ✓ Sign a detailed contract outlining all of the services to be performed, when each is to be performed and the price of each service.
- ✓ Prepare your property so that the lawn care service crew can properly do their job.
- ✓ Report any problems or concerns to the company right away. If you experience a problem, give the company a chance to fix it. If they do not fix the problem you can always file a complaint with the BBB or Chamber of Commerce.
- ✓ Enjoy your beautifully manicured lawn!

Conclusion

Hiring the right lawn care service can mean years of hassle-free property management. Hiring a low-quality lawn care service can mean tons of headaches, property damage and a terrible looking yard. If you are considering hiring a professional maintenance company for your yard then you owe it to yourself to do your research. Researching companies and interviewing them *before* you make a decision can end up saving you a ton of problems!

A great lawn care service can certainly make your life easier. All you have to do is pay your bill once a month or so and sit back and enjoy a beautifully manicured lawn and garden! Your grass can be thick and healthy and cut to just the right level, it could have the right amounts of fertilizers applied at the right time of year, the edges could look sharp and neat and the entire property could be pest free. All of this is possible- if you choose the lawn care service!