

1 Real Estate Advisor

Choosing the Right Lawn Care Service

Many people choose to hire a professional company to help maintain their lawn. Lawn care companies offer a range of services, from fertilizing and pest control to aerating, mowing and renovation. Here are some important questions to ask when deciding which lawn care service is best for you:

Is the company licensed? Nearly all states require lawn care companies to be licensed. The qualifications for obtaining a license vary from state to state, but having a license is one indication that the company is reputable and operating legally.

Does the company have a good track record? Ask neighbors and friends who have dealt with the company if they were satisfied with the service they received. Call the Better Business Bureau or the state or local consumer protection office in your area; have they received any complaints about the company? Determine from the state pesticide regulatory agency if the company has a history of violations.

Is the company affiliated with a professional lawn care association? Affiliation with a professional association helps members to stay informed of new developments in the lawn care field.

Does the company offer a variety of pest management approaches? Does it apply pesticides on a set schedule or only when they are really needed? Does it use integrated pest management, or "IPM" - an approach that often reduces pesticide use by combining it with other, non-chemical methods of pest control? More and more lawn companies are offering integrated pest management (IPM) in response to public concern about pesticides. Be aware that IPM is a general term and that companies may use it to describe a wide range of activities. Find out exactly what a company means if it says it uses IPM.

Is the company willing to help you understand your lawn's problems and the solutions? Lawn services generally apply fertilizers and pesticides. But you may be the one who mows and waters - and poor watering and mowing practices can lead to disappointing results. The company should tell you how it plans to take care of your lawn, and advise you about the work you need to do to keep your lawn in good shape.

Will the company tell you what pesticides it applies to your lawn and why, and what health and environmental risks may be presented by their use? You have a right to this information. If asked, the company should readily supply it. All pesticides sold legally in the United States are registered by EPA, but such registration is not a guarantee of safety. Ask to see a copy of pesticide labels to make sure they bear an EPA registration number, and to review the directions that should be followed.



Why Fertilize?

Most lawns need to be fertilized every year because they need more nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium than soils usually contain. It's important not to over-fertilize - you could do more harm to your lawn than good - and it's best to use a slow-release fertilizer that feeds the lawn slowly. It's also important to check the soil's pH. Grass is best able to absorb nutrients in a slightly acidic soil, with a pH of 6.5 to 7.0. Soil that is too acidic can be "sweetened" with lime; soil that's not acidic enough can be made "sourer" by adding sulfur. If a professional service takes care of your lawn, make sure it takes these same steps to develop good soil. There's no getting around it: your lawn's health is only as good as the soil it grows in.



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