

How to Select a Professional Lawn Care Service

Working as an extension agent with UF/IFAS Extension people frequently asked me to recommend lawn care services. However, my job does not allow me to recommend one company over the other, so I always take the opportunity to teach them how to select a lawn care company. Here are some questions to ask before choosing a lawn company.

Is the company Green Industry Best Management (GIBMP) certified? The GI-BMPs are a science-based educational program for Green Industry workers (lawn-care and landscape maintenance professionals), brought to you by UF-IFAS Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ program. The GI-BMPs teach environmentally safe landscaping practices that help conserve and protect Florida's ground and surface waters. Landscaping professionals that are GI-BMP certified learn how to protect the health of the homeowner's family, pets, and the environment. The new rule in Osceola County is that all lawn care professionals must be GI-BMP certified in order to legally operate in the county. This training is offered at the UF/IFAS Extension in Osceola County.

If company will be applying pesticides ask for their certificate of insurance. In Florida, state law requires commercial pesticide applicators to carry either insurance or a surety bond. In addition, make sure that the business is licensed. Florida law requires pesticide applicators to be certified and licensed. Request the license number of the business or person you are dealing with to be sure they are a legal applicator. You can check with Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) for these records.

Does the company or person have an occupational license to operate in the county in which you reside? Every person or company legally operating a lawn care business in Osceola County must maintain an up to date occupational license.

How will asking those questions benefit you as a homeowner? A person that has below fair knowledge of pesticides, fertilizers and even mowing of lawns can cause irreparable damage to people and the environment. For example, pesticide is poisonous and not taking adequate precautionary measures can cause harm to the applicator, homeowners, other plants, and animals in close vicinity. Applying fertilizer without basic knowledge will pose danger to underground water and surface water such as lakes and its inhabitants.

Be careful of the lawn company that tells you that they can do a better job than the current company you are using. They usually do not know the cause of your landscape problems. In many cases the lawn care company is not at fault your grass is not beautiful. Many times the landscape is faced with problems such as soil pH imbalance, disease problem, not having the right plant at the right place, and insect infestation.

Remember what works for your neighbor might not work for you; if the grass looks greener on the other side maybe it is growing over a sewer. For more information on horticulture, contact Grantly Ricketts, Horticulture Agent with UF/IFAS Extension at 321-697-3000 or gricketts@ufl.edu.