

Sales in Bloom

Lawn & Garden Equipment Can Make For Big Revenue

Written by Linda Beattie of Schiller Grounds Care, Inc.

In the rental industry, very few categories of product generate as much seasonal revenue as Lawn & Garden Power Equipment. Even before the winter frost has shown any sign of thaw, the consumer's thoughts turn to spring. The landscape contractor is booking jobs and considering the equipment he'll need. The homeowner who has looked out their window at their drab landscape all winter long may be considering that landscape and how they can change the scenery and also put some increased value into their property. For the rental dealerships that carry lawn and garden equipment this makes for blooming business and high revenues season after season.

The Lawn & Garden equipment category is broad and includes: aerators, dethatchers (turf rakes), edgers, pruners, seeders/overseeders, sod cutters, trenchers, tillers, trimmers (line and hedge), and, for transport; equipment trailers. The choice of whether or not to carry Lawn & Garden Power Equipment relies heavily on the rate of rental and return on investment. However, the lawn and garden category is often comprised of high ticket commercial equipment that the residential user, who may only utilize the equipment once or twice a season will not invest in owning, and, the landscaper who merely offers add-on services may not have the up front revenue to secure. These customers will turn to their local rental dealership to make their jobs easier and more cost efficient. Carrying lawn and garden equipment can be a rather large financial investment on your part, but knowing what to carry in your area and starting off small, with your current customer base, will reduce your risk and offer you the highest and quickest possible return on your investment. Here are a few Lawn & Garden Equipment standards that most rental stores shouldn't be without.

Lawn Care Equipment: Aerators, Dethatchers/Turf Rakes & Sod Cutters

Aerators

Aerators revitalize lawns by opening the soil for more effective penetration of air, moisture, and nutrients. Aeration also helps to reduce soil compaction. Less compaction means a healthier root system. The lawn will become more tolerant to heat, drought and traffic as well as more disease resistant. Engine-powered walk-behind aerators are the norm for efficient and less labor-intensive lawn aeration.

For small to mid-size residential jobs, consider a compact aerator that's designed to fit thru narrow property gates. Their weight is manageable, they utilize smaller engines and are easier to store and transport for both the dealership and the customer. Medium to large size properties would be better served by a larger unit that covers more ground in less time. Traditional aerator units require the user's strength to lift the unit high enough to remove the tines from the ground in order to turn the unit around to aerate the next row. Aerators aren't light in weight and after just a couple of rows, the user may become fatigued. Today, some manufacturers offer units with steering capabilities for a more pleasant rental experience. Another option is a stand-on aerator. Stand-on aerators operate similarly to walk-behind models with the added feature of the operator being able to stand or ride on the unit versus walking behind it. For very large areas not hindered by narrow gates, pull or tow-behind aerators are the most efficient aerating units. Pull-behinds are offered in either tow or 3-point hitch versions that come in a variety of widths and offer manual, electric or hydraulic lift options and some can be towed by a riding mower.



Today, some manufacturers offer aerator units with steering capabilities for a more pleasant rental experience.



Thatch, even at moderate levels of a 1/4 - 1/2-inch thick, can choke a lawn to death.

Dethatchers/Turf Rakes

Thatch is a communion of dead grass, roots, and other matter that builds up in a lawn over time. It's relatively common and collects on most lawns at some time or another. In time, thatch matter becomes stacked and then packs down or mattes and causes healthy grass blades to become stressed and weakened; they thin, and eventually die. Thatch, even at moderate levels of a quarter to half-inch thick, thatch can literally choke a lawn to death. The easiest and most thorough method of removing thatch is to use a dethatcher or powered turf rake. The dethatcher makes quick work of lifting grass-choking thatch from the surface level allowing the soil and grass stolens to breathe and attain moisture and nutrients.

Turf Rakes are offered in many styles and sizes. For small area jobs, hand-held units or attachments to otherwise dedicated units like mini or roto-tillers will do the job nicely. These handy lightweight units utilize layers of pliable steel combs to lift thatch to the surface. Hand-held's are easy to maneuver and are ample for smaller lawns and tight areas. For medium to large areas a walk-behind turf rake offers a broader area and will cover a larger area in a shorter amount of time. Walk-behinds offer a variety of blade assemblies. The most common blades are flail blades. Flail blades, while not pliable, are

individually mounted to the reel loosely, so that each blade can move freely and dangle from the reel. The thrusting of the blades traveling around the reel easily comb through grass to lift thatch at the surface level for removal and disposal. Removing lifted thatch is time consuming and you should let your customers know that going into the project. You can increase the revenue of the rental if you carry a dethatcher with an optional catcher bag attachment for customer convenience.

Sod Cutters

Starting a new lawn from seed is the most economical and commonly utilized method of establishing turf, but even under the best weather conditions and proper care, there is no guarantee that all of the seed will germinate and grow into thick, lush turf. There is also the time factor. Growing new sod from seed takes months. For instant gratification...turf sod replacement is the answer! There's a great deal to be said for the instant gratification of laying fresh sod! Lay it, tap it in, and water. That's all it takes to attain thick, lush turf in a matter of hours. As with any convenience service, there is a price to pay for an instant lawn. Sod farming is a billion dollar a year industry that is on the rise. When time is a factor, and it is for most consumers these days, there is no quicker, easier method of establishing or replacing existing turf. The housing industry is the primary market for turf grass sod and the greatest demand for sod is in metropolitan areas. Other major markets include: land developers, golf courses, parks, cemeteries, athletic fields, and schools. So there's plenty of sod business to go around and plenty of sod cutter rental business to be had.

In order to establish new sod, the existing turf, as well as a good portion of the existing root soil, needs to be removed at a consistent depth to establish the new sod's root system. Unlike many other turf care tools that are utilized to make a variety of manual jobs easier and more time efficient, the sod cutter is a dedicated tool used for one job and one job only - to cut through sod at an appropriate depth. Sod cutters offer a variety of blade widths, from as little as 12 inches on up to 24 inches or more. When renting sod cutters, remember, the wider the cutter blade - the wider and heavier the sod to be removed will be. This will help you and the customer decide the blade length that best suits their needs. Cut depth is very important, look for a sod cutter that offers an easy to adjust cutting depth.

In the Garden...and Beyond: Tillers

Tillers

When it comes to gardening equipment, the most popular rental unit is the tiller. Tilling is the act of loosening or breaking-up earth to make it suitable for planting. Done manually, this could take several laborious days. Manual soil prep requires removal of existing sod and digging up and turning over the dirt beneath with a shovel, breaking down clumps with a hoe, then combing the area with a rake to remove stones and such. Often after turning the soil, compost and other beneficial material is then incorporated into the dirt to make nutrient rich soil fit for planting. Turning over soil and getting it ready for planting is back-breaking work. Tillers utilize powered tines or blades that spin rapidly to pulverize the earth into a loose soil suitable for planting in a fraction of the time and with far less effort.

For small to medium sized areas, the hand-held Roto- (or Mini) Tiller has been a popular choice at the rental store since the first 2-cycle model roared onto the scene more than 25 years ago. Until then, tillers were large behemoth machines that required a great deal of strength to maneuver and handle. With the mini-tiller's light weight (20-30 lbs.), ease of use, and near effortless maneuverability - it's easy to understand the appeal that mini-tillers have to the gardener and landscaper alike. With the proper mini-tiller you can till deeply with little strain put on the customer. Mini-tillers are also the ideal tool to use when incorporating compost and other matter into the soil. Many mini-tiller manufacturers offer optional attachments for tackling other gardening and yard care jobs as well. From aerating to shallow trenching, the mini-tiller is quite a versatile garden and yard care tool. Get to know what attachments are available for the mini-tiller you carry for additional rental opportunities to customers with smaller properties.

For medium to large areas, a dedicated walk-behind mid-tine or rear-tine tiller would be the most efficient product choice. Walk-behind tillers are very powerful and take a little getting used to as they can buck the user around quite a bit depending on the ground conditions. For large areas or areas not inhibited by narrow gates, a tilling attachment to a tractor will allow for quick, fatigue-free tilling. Tow behind tillers may require additional weight added; look for a unit that offers weight sets or drums for customer convenience.



The hand-held tiller is a popular rental item for both the home gardener and landscaper alike.

General Power Equipment Rental Procedures:

- Before you rent any piece of power equipment it's important that the entire staff review the Safety Features and Owner's Manual supplied by the manufacturer for each product. Also review the Engine Manufacturer's Manual where applicable.
- Inspect equipment before and after each rental. Keep all nuts, bolts, and screws tight to be sure the equipment is in safe working condition.
- Check safety stickers and decals - replace any that are worn before you rent the unit out.

- Supply the Operator's or Owner's Manual and all safety support material with each unit.
- Be sure your telephone number is on the Owner's Manual and on the unit should the customer have any questions.
- Take the time to show the customer personally where the controls are and how to start and stop the equipment.
- Inform the customer of the proper attire to wear when operating power equipment: close fitting clothing, long pants (never shorts), and proper foot wear (closed shoes with good grip - never open toed shoes or sandals) and gloves to reduce the transmission of vibration to your hands. Prolonged exposure to vibration can cause numbness and other ailments.
- Review any personal safety equipment that the customer may need while operating the unit; goggles, hearing protection, gloves, etc. and have them readily available if the customer needs them.
- For gasoline-powered equipment, advise the customer to never run equipment indoors, never start an engine in a garage or enclosed area and review gasoline safety procedures with the customer.
- Show the customer how to initially fuel the product (if a 2-cycle engine go over the proper oil/fuel ratio), and be sure to go over the proper safety procedures to refuel the product as well.

END -

Photographs and diagrams courtesy of Schiller Grounds Care, Inc.