

## A Singular Focus



Source: [www.TurfMagazine.com](http://www.TurfMagazine.com)

Maine company focuses on specialty services



[Click image to enlarge.](#)

Mainely Grass employee Dan Homquist makes an application for season-long protection against white grubs.  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF MAINELY GRASS.

Many landscape contracting companies have taken the approach that offering umbrella services is the best way to weather economic ups and downs. But there are still companies that prefer to specialize in one area – and do it well.

Such is the case for Mainely Grass. Its owner, Paul Sevigny, founded a company that focuses primarily on pest management. Sevigny, who had previously worked in the fertilization business, started Mainely Grass in 2000. The company is based in York, Maine, and serves clients in southern Maine, the seacoast and southern New Hampshire with 23 full-time employees.

### **Mainely Grass**

**President:** Paul Sevigny

**Founded:** 2000

**Headquarters:** York, Maine

**Markets:** Southern Maine, theseacoast, southern New Hampshireand parts of Massachusetts

**Services:** Integrated pest management,fertilization (includingorganics)

**Employees:** 23

**Website:** <http://www.mainelygrass.com>

## Maintenance always needed

Focusing on one area can be risky, as many landscape contractors discovered during the Great Recession, while those with umbrella services may have lost revenue in one area, but not another. Sevigny points out that while the design/build contractors took a hit during the recession, homeowners continued to maintain their properties.

While he lost some business due to people losing their jobs, "We've grown year after year, right through the bad times," he says. "We're not recession-proof, but people still take care of what they've got. They have pride in what they have and maintain what they have."

He remains convinced that a company that specializes and excels in providing specialized services is always needed in every market.

"I work for a lot of landscapers and have worked for some who used to do what we do. A lot of them take on different things," says Sevigny. "We're in such a seasonal market that everything is based on timing. You have to have the right people in place at the right time to get done what you have to do. By keeping the company in a small segment of the lawn maintenance market, it makes us effective and our customers are truly happy with it."

The Mainely Grass business mix is 80 percent residential and 20 percent commercial.

"My commercial revenue is mostly property managers and landscape professionals who don't want to deal with fertilizer or pesticides," says Sevigny. He also networks with up to 50 landscape maintenance companies to provide for their gap in service.



[Click image to enlarge.](#)

Clients living adjacent to woodlands greatly appreciate the tick and mosquito control services Mainely Grass provides.

## Multi-step approach

The company offers a five-step lawn care program. The first step entails balanced fertilization to promote early spring green-up and a preemergent for controlling crabgrass and other problem annual grasses. The second step focuses on broadleaf weeds and a balanced fertilizer to increase the lawn's health and vigor. The third step involves granular slow-release fertilizers to provide proper nutrition when moisture supplies are unavailable. Broadleaf weed control and surface insect control is applied as needed.

The company provides continued monitoring of lawn and pest control for the fourth visit, and applies a balanced fertilizer to enhance plant development and growth and maintain healthy color. The fifth step, fall fertilization, helps root development to create new grass plants and a thicker lawn as well as any needed weed or pest control.

Mainly Grass also has a tree and shrub program, administered in six parts. The first is to apply spring dormant oil to control over-wintering insects, mites and their eggs. The second step is spring fertilization through a balanced feeding to improve plant color and flowering throughout the growing season, promote health and fend off stress.

The third step is spring insect and disease control to help protect new foliage and growth from pest problems. The fourth step is summer insect and disease control to help prevent damage caused by mid-season pests. The fifth step is late summer insect and mite control for remaining late-season damaging pests. The sixth step is fall fertilization to stimulate root growth, spring coloring and general plant health.

The company has a tick control program, administered in three applications. Its mosquito control program is administered through six sprays each season.

Mainly Grass also provides services in tree injection, fall pruning and deer feeding protection.

Sevigny's employees use the winter to take care of equipment maintenance and do sales and marketing.



[Click image to enlarge.](#)

Mainly Grass employs experienced and knowledgeable applicators. Don Berry brings 20 years industry experience solving the insect and plant disease problems for the company's customers.

## **A demand for organics**

Mainly Grass provides integrated pest management programs (IPM) and organic programs, depending on customer desires and landscape needs. The company's approach is 70 percent IPM and 30 percent organics.

Sevigny had been receiving an increasing number of requests from customers to provide organic solutions.

"There's an awareness out there," he says. "Mine has been a phosphate-free company right from the get-go because obviously phosphate was linked to freshwater pollution. All of the scientists are saying you don't need the extra phosphate unless you're seeding."

Mainly Grass does however use pesticides as needed. "If weeds start to get out of control, we'll spot-treat the weeds," he says. "We don't do any blanket applications of herbicides, the same thing with surface-feeding insects. If we have a problem in an area, then obviously we treat that area. We're trying to minimize the use but still get the results the homeowners are looking for."

There are several factors that dictate the approach, Sevigny says. "It depends on the lawn, its base, how the property is set up, if they have

irrigation, are there cultural practices in place, do they have someone doing lawn care on a weekly basis or is it something they're trying to manage on their own and they can't keep up with it or if there are other contractors," he says.

Sevigny says while his customers can do pest control and fertilization themselves, his company can provide the service at the same cost, with more benefits. That service is what sets his company apart from the competition, he says.

"If there's a problem on the lawn or something didn't work, they call and we're back out there within 24 hours taking care of the problem at no additional cost to our customers," he says. "We guarantee everything we do and back it up with a 100 percent satisfaction guarantee. Our people are trained, college-educated technicians. Customers get an expert on their lawn versus going to the store and reading the directions on the bag."



[Click image to enlarge.](#)

Mainly Grass offers several turf and ornamental treatment options based upon IPM principles. Some customers opt for its full "organic" program.

## **Hiring for keeps**

Sevigny says when he hires, he looks for people who are customer- oriented.

"Our business is all about customer service," he points out. "Our customers can buy the products we apply, but it's about on-time service and making sure we're meeting all of our customers' needs. Our guys work without supervision. We're looking for the trustworthy guy who is going to come to work every day and we're doing everything we can to make sure that every customer is happy."

That approach reflects in the company's cancellation percentage, Sevigny says, adding that in 2012, it was only 7 percent.

Although crewmembers work without supervision, quality control is ensured by field supervisors who regularly audit their routes.

Sevigny says the key to his company's success is the tenure of his employees. "The first five guys I hired when I started my business are still working for me today," he says. "We've had success because of the core growth I have here."

Sevigny identifies his biggest challenge as continuing to recruit quality people to service his customers.

"We're only as good as the people out there taking care of our customers' properties," he says. "We continue to recruit and look for the best people possible to take care of our customer base that is so loyal to us."

## **An optimistic future**

Sevigny sees a bright future ahead because he believes the industry is doing well.

"Homeowners and business people are still going to take care of their stuff," he says. "A lot of landscape contractors like to cut back their maintenance division when construction is big and booming, but maintenance is always going to be there."



The problem he sees for the industry is the people who get into the field because of what they perceive to be low overhead.

"There are a lot of people who we call 'Chuck in the truck'. They throw a mower in the truck and call themselves lawn experts," he says. "There are scary things we see out there. I tell my customers to look for landscape professionals. Ask for the qualifications. Ask about the experience. Ask what they have to back up what they're saying," he says.

Sevigny sees a bright future for his company as well. He just opened a new branch in Massachusetts in response to the requests of customers, many of which are seasonal with second homes and had been frequently asking him if he could do a job in their other home or business as well.

He surveyed customers with property in Massachusetts and instantly signed on 150 new clients.

The driving force for opening the new branch was finding the right person to run it "like an owner", Sevigny says. He did.

Carol Brzozowski, Coral Springs, Fla., is a member of the Society of Environmental Journalists and a frequent contributor to Turf magazine. Contact her at [brzozowski.carol@gmail.com](mailto:brzozowski.carol@gmail.com).