

Legal Marijuana Raises Questions for the Green Industry



Source: www.TurfMagazine.com

I still find it strange to write the words marijuana and green industry (the universe of lawns and urban landscapes where we make our living) in the same sentence. There's something discordant in connecting the two. Not that, passing into adulthood during the raucous '60s, I'm not familiar with marijuana. More on that later.

As you may know, [Scotts Miracle-Gro](#) thinks the expanding marijuana industry offers good business opportunities. In April 2015, the Marysville, Ohio-based company purchased one of the biggest names in marijuana cultivation, General Hydroponics, Santa Rosa, California.

More recently, the company spent another \$120 million on a lighting and hydroponics equipment company in Amsterdam and promises to invest about another \$150 million into the marijuana-growing business by the end of 2016, [according to Forbes magazine](#).

The acquisitions should come as no surprise.

In 2011, [The Wall Street Journal](#) quoted [Scotts Miracle-Gro CEO Jim Hagedorn](#) as saying, "I want to target the pot market. There's no good reason we haven't."

It's often said of my generation that if you can remember the '60s you weren't there. It's in reference to the decade's "Turn On, Tune In and Drop Out" reputation.

I say they're wrong as I was very much there, kicking back to the Motown sound during my high school days, then moving on to Sgt. Pepper's, Vanilla Fudge and Jefferson Airplane at a small liberal arts college in west central Indiana. I remember the '60s well ... wishing, as many young people of that generation did, that I too could experience the "Summer of Love" in San

Francisco. Instead I spent the summer of 1967 fueling pleasure boats at a massive marina on Lake Erie.

From what I've written so far, you might infer that I'm personally familiar with weed – I'm talking cannabis here. But you would be wrong. It's a long, long way from Haight Asbury to the small Midwest communities where my friends and I spent psychedelia's heyday. We had other things on our minds – things like the Vietnam War (stay in school or else), coeds, keggers and our futures.

That's not to say marijuana wasn't a very big deal in those days; it was. You could get it if you wanted it. But you risked a lot. Possessing and using pot was a serious criminal offense. And our small rural communities dealt out big fines and, in some cases, jail for young people they rounded up during their drug busts.

How things are changing – even in our industry.

Even though marijuana remains prohibited under federal law, four states – Washington, Oregon, Alaska and Colorado – have legalized and are regulating the sale of marijuana for recreational use. In total, 24 states (including the four already mentioned) have legalized pot to alleviate pain and suffering for victims of cancer and other major disorders.

Different sources disagree about the size of the adult-use regulated cannabis market and its growth potential. Several sources say the regulated market is \$3 billion this year. While [Bloomberg, in a recent article](#), pegged it at \$7.2 billion, and surmised it could reach \$23 billion by the end of the decade.

All of the above leads me to wonder: What does this mean for our green industry?

Should we expect plant nurseries where we access our trees, ornamentals and bedding plants to begin cultivating cannabis in those regions of the country where it is legal to do so? Yes, that process is underway as you read this.

How about drug screening? Many landscape companies insist upon drug screening prior to hiring job prospects. Drug testing detects tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the euphoria-inducing ingredient in cannabis. Growers will be producing marijuana with lower levels of THC. But marijuana is marijuana, after all.

Whatever legalization of marijuana means to the green industry – maybe very little in the end – at least for right now, it's still difficult for me to get my mind around it.

Read More: [Scotts Miracle-Gro Acquires Hydroponics Company](#)