

# Win Big with Fall Cleanup



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Leaves will be falling soon. It's time to gear up for fall cleanups and to begin educating clients about what goes into this property management service. You have to let them know everything you will be doing for them apart from just removing leaves from their properties.

"When offering fall cleanup services, there is a lot more that goes into it than just cleanup work," says Chris Demato, owner of Rock Bottom Landscaping & Fencing in Belle Mead, New Jersey.

Kevin J. VanOrd, president and founder of [Midwest Landscape Inc.](#), Novi, Michigan, says a typical fall cleanup service for his clients might include a final mow, removal of all fallen leaves, removal of annual flowers, raking and cultivating annual flower beds. It may also include removing any dieback of perennials. Many times, getting all of these tasks done requires two visits to prepare the landscape for the winter. Ensuring each property is fully winterized is time-consuming. Positioning the service as a timesaver for the clients can be beneficial in making the sale.

## **Commercial versus residential**

Professional Grounds Inc., Lorton, Virginia, offers its fall cleanup services under two separate umbrellas. The commercial maintenance department performs year-round maintenance at large commercial sites and HOAs, and includes services listed in the annual maintenance contract. Fall cleanup services are common in most grounds contracts in the mid-Atlantic market, says Tim Trimmer, CFO and landscape division manager. A typical commercial fall cleanup package includes a fall leaf removal in November and another in December.

The company's residential clients, on the other hand, handpick their services based on their individual needs. Each client's property has its own unique plan and pricing, says Trimmer, adding some clients opt to do some of the

cleanup on their own.

"We eliminated seasonal proposals which were sent throughout the year because it was time-consuming and annoying for our clients," Trimmer continues, adding that [Professional Grounds Inc.](#) has since gone to yearly contracts. "Our contracts are on auto-renew on an annual basis, with changes if we feel the property needs to be re-evaluated for cost and pricing."

## **When's the best sales time?**

Opinions vary in terms of when to make sales for fall cleanups. Demato says he generally tries to sell fall cleanup in early spring, when most customers are signing on for services. But Demato says it's also possible to target new clients come fall.

Trimmer lands new fall residential jobs by targeting his design/build clients. These are the ideal clients to bring to the maintenance side as the relationships are already there.

Demato says selling to homeowners with properties containing fewer trees, thus fewer leaves, is more of a challenge even though there is a lot of work that still needs to be done. If there's not much to rake, clients may think they can easily tackle the job on their own. This is where client education is incredibly critical. "Clients must understand fall cleanup goes well-beyond just blowing leaves," he says. "Knowing what to prune, how to prune, what to fertilize and what not to fertilize are just some of the essentials to a healthy fall garden or landscape."

## **Staffing and timing issues**

Most landscape companies count on their maintenance crews to handle fall cleanups.

VanOrd says maintenance crews are typically combined to form larger cleanup crews. Because the fall cleanup season is short and often unpredictable in terms of weather, VanOrd limits the number of customers who receive fall cleanups to only those who are full-season maintenance contract customers.

Professional Grounds dedicates the same foreman and crew to each property. Trimmer says that's best for both quality control and to ensure clients are on a friendly, first-name basis with the crew leaders.

Advanced planning for fall cleanups is critical because the services come with unforeseen challenges. VanOrd says the weather and clock are his company's biggest hurdles during the fall.

"Once the snow begins to cover the ground, any scheduled but unfinished fall cleanup work has to be put on standby until the snow melts," VanOrd says. "We always guarantee the work will be completed. Most times, we are able to complete it in a timely manner."

VanOrd says each fall cleanup season can vary in terms of leaf drop by as

much as two to three weeks. This complicates scheduling fall cleanup services. Scheduling multiple service dates helps, though VanOrd says it sometimes takes additional explanation. "Ideally we schedule a first occurrence in late October or early November and then return for a second occurrence approximately two to four weeks later, depending on the individual site requirements," he explains. "Some sites may be more heavily wooded while others may be heavily planted with annual flowers. These kinds of differences will dictate, to some degree, how and when the sites are scheduled."

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