



**GREEN BLADE  
LAWN CARE**

The lawn health experts.

# The Lawn Care Industry's **DIRTY LITTLE SECRETS**

If you had any doubt whether liquid or granular is better,  
you won't after you read this.

I recently read an article in Lawn & Landscape magazine about the differences and benefits of liquid versus granular fertilizer. Lawn & Landscape magazine is an American published, industry magazine sent to thousands of companies in the green industry. The article I read polarized my stance on liquid fertilizer like never before. Lawn & Landscape has been publishing for many years and features the best, brightest, and most experienced veterans in the green industry covering every aspect imaginable. This particular article was written by Robin Roenker, a freelance writer based in Kentucky. She also writes articles on business and finance. While she does not have a foundation in lawn care or landscaping, what was quite evident in the article, and the reason it's an effective piece in an industry publication, was her keen observation of how liquid or granular fertilizer might appeal to business owners, not the homeowner.

As I read the article I was quite put off by what I read. The lawn care industry struggles to maintain even a minimal level of professionalism. We battle every day to build our brand and convince the public we aren't high school dropouts, but educated, successful businesspeople running a company that earns seven figure revenue. I cringe whenever I see or hear of competitors or industry leaders suggesting that cutting corners is acceptable. I find the majority of ads put out by my competitors to be laughable. If only my customers could read between the lines, knew the loopholes and options lawn care companies have to cheat their customers and pretend they're actually providing the service, just in case they happen to be home to see the job being done.

Lawn & Landscape magazine is written for the industry. The articles are not meant for the consumer's eyes. As such, Robin Roenker's article tells it like it is from a business perspective directed to lawn care companies, most of whom are concerned with just one thing; their bottom line. I read another article in a recent edition of Entrepreneur magazine about service. The writer made an obvious observation about the mainstream thinking of most companies in the service industry; that they only need to get a fixed percentage of customers each year in order to generate an income no matter how bad their service was. They rely on just a few new customers each year who don't know any better. They're not out to be the number one company in the industry, they're content to be number four or five, and rip off the handful of new customers that buy into their empty promises each year. Being number one is too much trouble for them and most often, the service company they operate is merely a secondary income, and not their primary source.

I expected the Lawn & Landscape article to offer a balanced perspective of benefits versus drawbacks of liquid versus granular fertilizer. Keep in mind, the author writes predominantly business and finance articles, and it's quite fascinating how someone with her background quickly identified which type of fertilizer might better suit a company where the customer and results are the focus, versus companies solely focused on the bottom line.

In her article she identifies the following list of benefits and advantages to each type of fertilizer. Remember, this is an industry magazine, not meant for consumer eyes. When considering liquid versus granular there are two critical factors to consider: application method and product. You decide which sounds better to you.

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## APPLICATION METHOD

- Smaller, hard to navigate areas, especially those adjacent to precious flowers and shrubs, call for liquid fertilizer that can be applied accurately. Granular application often results in wasted and undesired product in flower and shrub beds and product also tends to end up on paved surfaces where it gets washed into storm drains, polluting rivers, lakes, and streams. **ADVANTAGE: LIQUID**
- Large, open areas of turf, where applicators have less concern about accidentally spreading fertilizer into non-desirable areas, granular provides the most efficient method. "It's just faster and you can cover more area..." Sounds great to a lawn care provider but is it better for the customer? As one company owner put it, "It's easier to train people (with granular) as opposed to spraying..." Again, sounds like a bargain to granular companies. **ADVANTAGE: GRANULAR** if you aren't concerned about the product.
- When it comes to weeds, granular companies have no choice but to use a liquid sprayer in a separate spraying of weed control. One must ask, how much could a lawn care company be shortchanging their customers on product if it's actually cheaper for them to send their technicians over your lawn twice? I can tell you from experience that labour is a lawn care company's largest expense. The only way we could walk over every customer's lawn twice, is if we drastically cut back on product. Isn't it also curious that there's no such thing as granular weed control. Ever wonder why that is? If granular fertilizer is so much better, in a multi-billion dollar industry, why hasn't a single pesticide or fertilizer company come out with a granular weed control? **ADVANTAGE: LIQUID**
- Got thinner grass in some areas? Got more weeds in some areas? Liquid applications allow technicians to customize your treatment for each and every client focusing more on troubled areas. Granular spreaders are difficult and time consuming to adjust and spread product so widely that they cannot focus on small patches that need extra attention. **ADVANTAGE: LIQUID**
- When it comes to insect problems, again, granular options are virtually non-existent. Those that do exist are slow acting. When the situation calls for immediate action and immediate results, granular lawn care companies turn to liquid insect control. Why? Because it's fast, it's accurate, and it works better than any granular product. **ADVANTAGE: LIQUID**
- When using the superior application method that liquid application offers, fertilizer, weed control, and insect control can all be applied simultaneously, precisely, for the exact conditions of the day, and for the exact needs of each individual lawn. Something impossible for granular companies to do. **ADVANTAGE: LIQUID**
- Granular companies don't require a special truck with a tank on it. Any pickup will do. This is very appealing to many smaller operations that can't afford a dedicated tanker truck. A spreader and a few bags of fertilizer is all anyone needs to perform granular fertilizer applications. But what happens when it comes to weed control? As a customer, you wait and wait, until the weed control truck makes its way back to you. **ADVANTAGE: LIQUID**
- Have you ever seen a granular lawn care company blow off a driveway or sidewalk after mis-applying product all over the driveway and sidewalk? Trust me, it's rare. In this day and age, with Lake Winnipeg and our rivers and streams as polluted as they are, it's more important than ever to insure this isn't happening. This is pure waste, plain and simple, and guess what? You're paying for it. In Minnesota, this has become such a huge problem that companies can be severely fined for not blowing off driveways and sidewalks. Unfortunately, there are no such laws in Manitoba. We have a saying here at Green Blade Lawn Care when training our staff on how to apply liquid fertilizer; "On the lawn, where it belongs". **ADVANTAGE: LIQUID**
- Fertilizer companies claim, and rightly so, that granular fertilizer is easier to handle and transport than liquid. I agree 100% and can tell you from 26 years of experience that handling and transporting liquid fertilizer is definitely more challenging. But how do our challenges handling liquid fertilizer affect you, the customer? It doesn't affect you at all. You're hoping for a nice lawn. How much does the difficulty of transporting the fertilizer to your property play into your choice of which company to use? Not at all would be my guess. Any company choosing granular fertilizer over liquid fertilizer for the sake of ease of handling and transport is doing so out of sheer laziness, plain and simple. This raises some concern that fertilizer manufacturers are appealing to the laziness of the industry to market their granular fertilizer, doesn't it? **ADVANTAGE: GRANULAR**

## PRODUCT

- Rain coming? Or maybe it just rained yesterday or earlier in the week. Cool weather or hot? Liquid applications can be adjusted not only on a seasonal basis, but even on a daily or hourly basis to best suit the days' weather. We adjust our formula daily to ensure our applications are the best possible for the temperature, moisture, and conditions of the day. Granular fertilizer is pre-mixed in one formulation. Once it's on your lawn, you're stuck with it, no matter what happens with the weather. This becomes a critical issue when there is significant rain. Too much rain causes a sudden release of nutrients from coated granular pellets as the layers are rapidly eroded like a candy dissolving in your mouth. Excessive rain can also cause iron deficiencies in the lawn. Companies using liquid fertilizer can immediately add iron as needed at these times.

### ADVANTAGE: LIQUID

- Granular fertilizer is a hardened pellet of nutrients. As humidity and rainfall break down the layers of the pellet, the nutrients are released. Lots of rain, expect a sudden release of nutrients. Little to no rain, don't expect your lawn to be very green. Granular fertilizer only works when it is activated by humidity or moisture. Thus, your fertilizer performance is really up to Mother Nature and how much it ends up raining. I'm not much of a gambler, but I think there's a pretty good reason why betting on the weather isn't popular in casinos. Liquid fertilizer is applied to and absorbed directly into the plant. Once on the plant, it gets absorbed and used as much or as little as the plant is growing. The point being, that it is always being used by the plant. With liquid fertilizer, only the plant relies on the weather, not the product. **ADVANTAGE: LIQUID**



- Granular fertilizer is synonymous with the term 'slow release' allowing granular companies to perform applications much further apart on the premise that the product is lasting several weeks or even months. As a consumer this should be of great concern. So no one will be back to my lawn for weeks you say? Considering summer is only about 20 weeks long, somehow that doesn't sound reassuring. What about the weeds? With such a short season, and given how quickly our temperatures and moisture conditions change in just a few weeks, I would be concerned about how

well the granular application I received weeks ago is serving my needs weeks later under very different conditions. But isn't that what you would expect a lawn care company to do if they are only interested in the bottom line; visit you rarely, apply sparingly? How exactly is this a better lawn care program? Liquid fertilizer, and especially today's weed control, requires vigilance and demands frequent visits with applications suited to the existing conditions.

### ADVANTAGE: LIQUID

- Some of the latest granular products claim to last 60, 90, and even 180 days! Is that believable? On day 60, or 90, or 180 exactly how much product do you suppose is still working for you? How can these excessive periods take into account whether this season will be rainy or a drought? Are these products geared for the customer or lawn care companies hoping to make a quick buck? **ADVANTAGE: You decide.**
- Under the title "Cost" Robin Roenker's article starts off "There may be a cost savings to granular fertilizer when additives are factored in." Is this article trying to help lawn care companies find the best application method, or the cheapest method? The answer is clear with the first sentence under the title of "Cost", the section lawn care company owners are most paying attention to. The additives she speaks of, refer to a massive line of 'filler' products. Extremely cheap additives that have no nutrient value whatsoever. Perlite, vermiculite, sand, limestone, and my personal favourite, styrofoam beads. Don't believe me? Next time you see a granular lawn application taking place, run over and check it out. Get down real close to the lawn and look for the beads. This is something that is now happening so often in North America that an all new term is emerging to describe this epidemic practice called "Ghosting Lawns" where a homeowner is told an application took place, and in fact there may very well appear to be beads of fertilizer on the lawn, but in reality, the majority of those beads are poly beads with no nutrient value whatsoever. Liquid fertilizer acts fast and with obvious results within days. There's no disputing whether an application took place. But when a granular company tells you their product is slow release and lasts for months, what can you do but wait and wonder if they really did put any fertilizer on your lawn or if you've been had. **ADVANTAGE: LIQUID**
- Granular companies falsely claim that they can apply higher nitrogen fertilizer than liquid companies. This is blatantly false and misleading. Both liquid and granular companies have access to nitrogen products capable of burning your lawn to the ground. The most important factor when using Nitrogen however, is timing. Nitrogen is most effectively used in spring to generate a quick green up and thick turf. One application of a high nitrogen fertilizer in spring to generate a quick green up will not address your long-term needs should the next visit be weeks later. The timing of nitrogen applications should be short. Frequent visits, early in the season, will generate the best results. An initial healthy application of nitrogen, followed by top-up applications of lesser amounts of nitrogen ensure your lawn is lush, full, and healthy, before the heat and stresses of summer arrive. **ADVANTAGE: LIQUID**



# READ BETWEEN THE LINES

## Weed Control

Next time you pick up one of our flyers, or if you've read one recently, you should have noticed that at Green Blade Lawn Care we include weed control with every visit. Why on earth wouldn't we? Doesn't every company? The answer to that question is a most definite 'No'. Most companies DO NOT include weed control with every visit. Do you really think weeds don't grow after the spring? This is what they might have you believe which is completely ridiculous. Fact is, weed control is very expensive, and especially time consuming if you're a granular company which most of our competitors have now switched to. Next time you get a competitor's ad, check the programs. Not all will include weed control in every visit.

One of the most common complaints we hear about our competitors is that the customer received their first visits that included weed control, and then they had to keep calling the company over and over again to address weeds that came up over the season when the visits no longer included weed control.

## First Impressions, Last Impressions

At Green Blade Lawn Care we strive to impress. We start with our flyer. It's big, it's bold, it's glossy, and full colour. It's intent is to educate our customers, to help our customers, and to impress upon our customers that we spare no expense and when we do something, we do it right. How impressed are you with a one-page ad in one colour ink that states nothing more than a bunch of lawn program names and prices? We have mere weeks to earn your business, deliver an impressive first visit, and leave your lawn looking amazing by the end of the season. Delivering a solid first impression and last impression is what has made us the largest lawn care company in Manitoba.

## Price

Cheap is not slang for excellent service, or quality product. Back to the one-page flyer in one colour ink with nothing but programs and prices. Who books service with these companies anyway? People who are cheap, that's who. You can't get a grade A steak at a drive thru. Manitoba is the coupon clipping, no gst, seniors discount, and nickle and dime capital of the world. If you can turn a profit here, you can make it big anywhere. There's always a certain percentage of the population that makes a poor decision based on nothing but the cheapest price and that's exactly what that company is counting on and that's exactly why they put so little effort into their ad.

Of all the bigger lawn fertilizer companies in Winnipeg, all of them are either franchises or they are owned by someone as a secondary source of income while they work at their 'real' business. Very few are owned and operated by people who put their blood, sweat, and tears into striving to be the number one lawn care provider in the province.

## Insect Control Insurance??

I laughed when I first heard of this but one company has been selling it for years, so I guess it seems to be making them some free money. Insect damage is rare. Indeed, it can be severe when it happens, but the cost of the insect insurance is no doubt far in excess over the years than to simply pay for a treatment if and when one is ever needed.

## Name Games

Bronze, Silver, Gold, Standard, Deluxe, Ultimate, Eco, Premium. Companies all over town have copied more successful companies on the names of their programs in the hopes of creating some confusion and winning a sale with a cheaper price. Another call we get is that another company is offering their Deluxe program for less than our Deluxe program. A minute or two to actually read the details reveals that their Deluxe program is only cheaper than ours because it features less visits and less weed control and is, in actual fact, more expensive when you compare the price to the number of visits. Same program names but definitely not the same programs.

## Who's the Owner and what are they up to?

Take a few minutes and try to find out who owns Winnipeg's largest lawn care companies. Good luck with that. After 26 years in the industry, I don't even know who some of my competitors are owned by. We put our names right on our letterhead. It's right on our website under 'About Us' and we're proud of it. Now why wouldn't someone want the public to know they owned an honest, community involved, successful company, unless of course it wasn't necessarily all those things. One look at our material and website and one can see the work we do in our community. Here at Green Blade Lawn Care we give back. We're involved in many charities, some of which are not even mentioned. What does it take for professional sports teams to endorse your brand? For 26 years our family has built Green Blade Lawn Care into the respected and trusted brand it is today. We have long term relationships in our community and a reputation to uphold with every customer that gives us the opportunity to serve them and that's more of a guarantee than you'll get from our competitors.

### AWARDS:



### PROUDLY SUPPORTING:



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