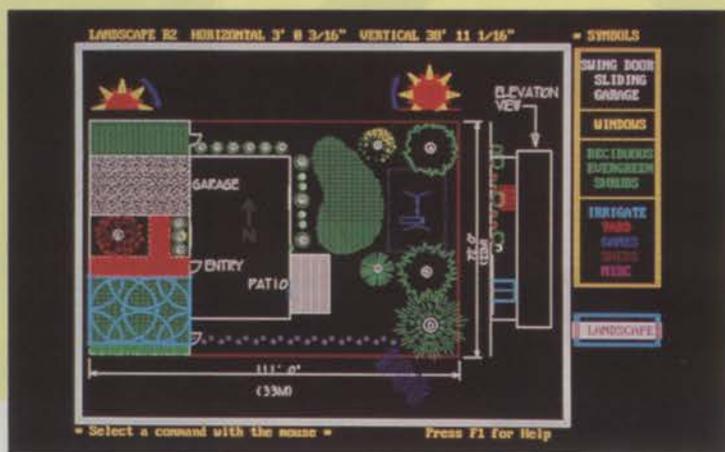


# Computers help landscapers

# conquer the fourth dimension

Computer-aided designs help the client envision his or her dream landscape and see how it will change over the years.



By James E. Guyette

■ The landscape manager who feels at home with a computer will also be much more at home when discussing a client's needs. Not only is computer-aided designing quickly becoming a competitive requirement, but other computer uses such as inventory control are also important.

"One of the biggest changes within the industry is the use of computers," says Dr. George Longnecker, professor of landscape horticulture at the University of West Virginia. "A lot of people really haven't gotten into this yet," he acknowledges, "but the young folks coming into the profession really need to know this."

Students who balk at learning about bytes can chalk up a hard lesson when trying to land a landscaping job, cautions Longnecker, who spoke at the Northeast Ohio Green Industry Educational and Winter Trade Show. "Our alumni are telling us, 'If they don't have a computer background, don't bother sending us a letter or resume,'" he reveals.

"There are so many ways that computers have changed the industry," Longnecker points out. For the astute landscape manager and designer, computers are aiding efforts to conquer the always-pesky fourth dimension.

"The fourth dimension is *time*," he explains. "The computer is going to help us: with a computer we can actually predict that fourth dimension. You take space and time and it equates with *change*."

**Booting up**—In the landscape industry,

you can plot the normal changes that crop up within a property's design characteristics. Adjustments to drawings can be made and future plant growth can be projected and planned for. "We're dealing very strongly with that dimension."

By using the assorted software programs available, landscape designers can make detailed, lifelike drawings that can be altered with a simple movement of a mouse in response to the customers' reactions.

"You can actually bring in an image of the front of their house or building. You can put in plants and things and show them what it looks like," Longnecker notes.

"They can see what it is they're getting. When the client says, 'That isn't really what I want,' you can change it right then," he points out.

"With a computer you just plug in the changes; changes are cheap," Longnecker reports. "You used to have to go back and redo the drawings," he recalls. "You'd spend all that time, and if they didn't like it you'd get upset. Now, re-drawing is so simple."

Computer drawings allow you to portray the growth patterns of the selected plant materials proposed for the job. "Once a landscape is planted, it's just the beginning and it's going to change." As an example, previously a landscape design might have included certain high-growing species of plantings around a house. "Twelve years later you couldn't see the house," Longnecker observes.

A computer helps you avoid overplanting. "They may look good when they're planted, but five years later you have to rip half of them out," he laments. No more.

"You're now putting the right plant in the right place," he says. If a client wants a certain species to be planted in an area that just happens to be underneath power lines, you can demonstrate what the project will look like years later. The customer will see right away that the treasured evergreens could some day be sparking up a storm. "Those are obvious things that people need to be aware of."

The changing of the seasons can be another matter to discuss with the client. A design that works well in the summer could be doomed when that same scene is viewed under the smothering cover of a winter snow pile or a heavy helping of poisoning road salt.

**Getting on line**—The landscape manager or designer can better sell the level of his or her professionalism via the computer, too. This can come in handy when dealing with do-it-yourselfers who may not have the proper shopping expertise. "They'll put something in that's not even going to grow there," Longnecker points out. "You're not going to get the right advice from the folks pushing the plants," he adds.

"Usually when they go out and put in several hundred dollars worth of plants (that aren't right for the yard or climate), they realize they need some help." For landscape professionals witnessing this type of spectacle in the making, "You have to get it across to the public that with the *plant* comes the *knowledge*. This is one of the extras you get from the pros," Longnecker explains.

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