

## News & Issues

### Turfgrass, the Rodney Dangerfield of landscape plants?

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LM Direct!

*Turfgrass.* We walk on it, play games on it, picnic on it, receive our diplomas on it, sometimes get married on it, bury our loved ones under it, and some of us let our dogs poop on it. (Hey, pick that up!)

Stop for a minute and consider the role it plays in our businesses, our landscape industry, our neighborhoods and (we don't feel this is an exaggeration) our society. Similarly, stop and consider the blighted areas of our cities, worse yet those regions of the world where turfgrass is either rare or non-existent because of extreme poverty (Haiti), war (Baghdad) or drought (Darfur).

As vital as it is to our lifestyle, turfgrass is also the least appreciated single landscape plant in North America. Or so it sometimes seems.

#### Least appreciated?

Consider that the Sustainable Sites Initiative (SITES), which has the potential to have a dramatic impact on the professional Green Industry, for the most part ignores turfgrass. If you're not familiar with SITES ([sustainable-sites.org](http://sustainable-sites.org)), become familiar with it. The project (a partnership of the American Society of Landscape Architects, the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and the United States Botanic Garden) is overseeing the development of a voluntary system to rate the sustainability of our manmade ecosystems, including the landscapes that we design, install and maintain. Many of the 150-plus pilot projects now underway to develop the SITES rating system seek ways reduce the amount of turfgrass within our landscapes or to replace it with other plants or materials.

While the effect of SITES upon our turf care and landscape maintenance businesses will be difficult to gauge until the rating system is rolled out perhaps as early as 2013, its reach is ambitious and encompasses everything from residential landscapes to national parks.

Because SITES is still in its development phase, people within the professional Green Industry are hopeful that the project will yet recognize the many environmental and social benefits of turfgrass in our urban environments.

For example, Dr. Frank Rossi, associate professor of turfgrass/horticulture at Cornell University, has proposed that SITES award points in its rating system for using turfgrass on landscapes as long as the species are appropriate to a site's climate, and that grass offers benefits, such as preventing erosion, serving as a carbon capture or encouraging sport or recreation, beyond being merely something to admire through the week and mow each weekend.

Hopefully, SITES will consider Rossi's suggestions and recognize the vital role that turfgrass plays in creating ever-more-environmentally sustainable and ecologically positive urban landscapes.

Meanwhile, we'll continue to report on turfgrass and focus on management practices that will allow turfgrass to retain its position as our industry's and our society's most valuable landscape plant.

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