

# PLANET NEWS

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## The great outdoors

*Large, diverse property blends beautifully with pastoral setting*



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# The great outdoors

*Large, diverse property blends beautifully with pastoral setting*



**T**his beautiful 30-acre property looks like it belongs in a New England story book. It features a long winding drive, large sweeping lawn areas, a beautifully designed granite pool area, and neat displays of annual and perennial color — all set in harmony with the surrounding natural beauty and rolling hills. Hoffman Landscapes, Inc., located in Wilton, Connecticut, designed, installed, and now maintains the landscape.



“The property owners are one of our long-time customers,” relates company president Mike Hoffman, CLP. “We previously built a pool environment for them before they moved away from our service area several years ago. After coaxing us for a couple of years to help with their landscape needs, we accommodated their wishes, redesigned the landscape, and now manage its maintenance.”

### Neat and simple

As Hoffman explains, one of the client's initial priorities was a new swimming pool and outside entertainment area, an assignment he turned over to company landscape architect Brian Cossari. “The property was nearly bare bones when we took it over,” says Cossari. “After designing and locating the pool, we proceeded to renovate the existing landscape. The customer preferred a landscape that was simple and clean, so we kept most perennials and annuals close to the house and the pool area.”

He continues, “One of our biggest challenges, though, was designing and installing the long driveway, one that would have the rustic look of a gravel drive, yet without the nuisance and maintenance associated with loose stones. The solution was to essentially lay the gravel on an asphalt and oil base. It looks like a natural gravel drive, yet the stones don't move. All this work had to be performed while maintaining a travel way for the homeowner who is an emergency medical technician and often exited the property unannounced for emergency calls.”



Throughout the entire design and installation process, Cossari worked closely with Hoffman's property maintenance general manager David Schrang. "We mow the turf with mid-size walk-behind mowers, trim the long drive, inspect and prune trees, maintain the garden beds, and control weeds and pests," relates Schrang. "During the winter months, we also snowplow the drive and provide ice control.

"Our job is made easier because we provided input and suggestions for specific plantings during the original installation. The integrated effort resulted in the best selection of plantings for each space." Included in this palette, he adds, are shrubs like rhododendron, hydrangea, lilac, inkberry, boxwood fairy roses, and spirea. Coneflowers, shasta daisies, salvia, peonies, and ornamental grasses are among the perennials. The plants have to be successful because we provide a lifetime warranty with their installations.

### The turf challenge

Of the 325 hours maintenance personnel devote to the site annually, they spend an average of 6½ hours a week for 30 weeks just mowing the 115,400 square feet of lawn area. "Because of the limited supply of well water for irrigation, we've divided the turf into two zones: A & B," Schrang explains. "Zone A is close to the house and receives optimum water and fertilizing. In zone B, we limit the fertilizing and conserve water. In both areas, we side discharge clippings, except around the pool area where we collect them."

Mower blades are sharpened daily and equipment is maintained to the highest standards, he adds. "Our customers don't want to see any oil drops on their drives. It just goes along with the territory. We make sure everything we operate is in top working order."

As for mowing the turf, Schrang notes that walking instead of using sulkies greatly improved the cut quality. Reducing operator ground speed provides better mowing patterns and often eliminates the need to double cut. He goes on to explain that the property receives weekly on-site inspections from both turf and IPM supervisors, resulting in timely treatment and elimination of pest and disease issues. Every two weeks, a detail crew cleans and edges the beds, prunes

trees and shrubs, and monitors the border landscaped areas for pests that intrude from the adjacent meadows and forest preserve.

### Top priority

"The local deer population is large and aggressive, and we worked closely with David's group to ensure we installed plant material that wouldn't be too inviting," Cossari relates. "Together, we place deer-tolerant plant material into three categories. In the first category are plants that don't need to be sprayed with an animal repellent. The second includes plants that will survive with spraying, and the third includes those plants one should never install. For instance, deer have an incredible appetite for our state flower, Mountain Laurel."

Among rather unusual challenges for Schrang's maintenance team is the pool area where granite paving stone is intolerant to Roundup and other oil-based herbicides; the stone readily stains. Instead, crew members gently sweep a pre-emergent into the narrow joint areas for weed control.

Another challenge is keeping the stone-lined drive free of weeds. Bordered on both sides by round fieldstone edging, the drive adds another level of difficulty to the already "miles" of weekly trimming.

"Over the years, working directly with the customer on a variety of landscaping projects has created a tight bond between us and an understanding of how important it is to develop a landscape that benefits the homeowner and the environment," Hoffman emphasizes. "The view from this property is just as spectacular as the property itself, but in a different way. The nearby pastures and native spruce combine with the rolling hills of Connecticut to create a true pastoral setting. By working with the customer, our design/build and maintenance teams help ensure their home and landscape are a perfect fit. 🌿"

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#### Environmental Improvement Awards Program

Submitted by Hoffman Landscapes, Inc.

Type of Award: Grand Award

Category: Residential Landscape Management

