



December 2, 2002

Rochester Landscape Company Reaps IPM Award for Green Practices

by Mary Woodsen

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ITHACA, NY: Laurie Broccolo's landscape business in Rochester, NY, may not charge the lowest prices. Her labor costs are higher, she hardly advertises, and she even runs seminars for the competition. But breaking the traditional rules of business has proven to be a successful strategy for Broccolo, her 29 employees, and her 2,800 clients.

Another strategy for success is Broccolo's practice of IPM, or integrated pest management-techniques that minimize the use of pesticides while promoting soil and plant health.

Dedication to methods that have proven so valuable to their clients has won Broccolo and her employees the 2002 "Excellence in IPM Award" for leadership in engaging in environmentally sound practices for landscape care. Broccolo - with about 10 of her employees - received the award on November 13 from the New York State Integrated Pest Management Program, which is part of Cornell Cooperative Extension, at the New York State Turf and Grounds Exposition in Syracuse, NY.

"We offer a customized service that's environmentally sensitive," says Broccolo. "We're in touch with our clients often. We let them know what pest problems we've found-or that their properties are looking great. We love what we do, and it shows. I'm absolutely thrilled to receive this award. The support of the Cornell community has been key to growing our business, and we're incredibly grateful."

"Laurie Broccolo built this company, but it's clearly a team effort," said Michael Hoffmann, director of the New York State IPM Program. "We're as thrilled to give this award as they are to get it."

Cutting Edge Horticulture

A typical day at Broccolo Tree and Lawn Care begins at 6:30 a.m. The landscape crews may be edging or mulching, planting or pruning, depending on the season or the day. But while they're at it, they also pay attention to the soil, plant vigor, signs of stress, insect pests,

and/or disease.

If they see a problem, they get on their radio and call the IPM crew member-the IPM "tech"-in their area who knows the properties and pests so well they can predict right down to the week that a particular pest might show up in lawns or on flowers. With the help of horticulturist Jody Mills, back at headquarters, the tech identifies the problem and suggests remedies that crews might employ.

Such attention to detail reaps rewards. During the summer, Mills analyzes about 15 samples of mites, bugs, and diseased-looking twigs, leaves, and blooms each day. Catching pests early cuts way back on pesticide use. Many years, Broccolo's crews have only had to treat for grubs on about 3 percent of their clients' lawns and gardens.

Keeping up with current practices is important in landscaping. The Broccolo group researches topics ranging from reduced-risk biopesticides to how to alleviate soil compaction. They depend on information from Cornell University and other universities, from the International Society of Arboriculture, and the NYS Turfgrass Association.

One of their biggest sources of expertise is Cornell Cooperative Extension of Monroe County. "We talk with them almost every day," says Mills. "We let them know what we're seeing in the field, and they help us analyze the problems we find. We couldn't survive without them."

Broccolo's also has a close working relationship with Jana Lamboy, the ornamental specialist for the NYS IPM program. "We're working together to develop standards for integrated pest management in landscape care," says Lamboy. "Laurie and her staff are always looking for new ways to reach people and teach them about IPM."

>From sending out newsletters and "green tips" flyers, to talking at garden shows, and educating callers while they wait to be transferred on the phone, Broccolo's helps customers understand what IPM is all about.

Broccolo's commitment to environment and community goes even further than IPM. Their equipment shop uses soy-based oils, hydraulic fluids, lubricants, and diesel fuel. The maintenance crews use ground-up yard waste for compost. And each year, Broccolo's sponsors the Tinker Park Field Days in Rochester, where they teach kids and families about lawn care and IPM, help them identify pond critters, lead nature walks, and demonstrate tree climbing and pruning skills.

It may not be surprising when the last four digits of your phone number are "4IPM," but for Broccolo and her crew, IPM and more is all in a day's work.

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