

PGRs

save labor

Because plant growth regulators retard growth of ornamentals, contractors get more work done with fewer employees

BY B. TODD BUNNELL, PH.D. AND SHANE BARNEY



Plant growth regulators can greatly reduce the amount of trimming needed.

1. An untreated wax leaf ligustrum.
2. A wax leaf ligustrum treated with Cutless at 7 lbs/1,000 sq ft. at 21 weeks
3. And one treated at 14 lbs/1,000 sq ft.

Landscape professionals continually seek unique solutions for the biggest challenge facing their industry, which is labor. One such solution is the incorporation of plant growth regulators (PGRs) into their maintenance program for landscape ornamentals. PGRs can serve as a supplement to a company's labor force, allowing the company to do more with less.

What are PGRs?

A plant growth regulator is defined as any substance or mixture of substances intended, through physiological action, that accelerates or retards the rate of growth or maturation of plants. PGRs have been around for decades and have been used to selectively regulate the growth of plants across many market segments including: turfgrass, greenhouse ornamentals and, in recent years, landscape ornamentals. In landscape ornamentals, they're applied to plants primarily to suppress or reduce vegetative growth in order to minimize

cost and labor associated with pruning or trimming. Currently, three PGRs are labeled and registered for use to suppress vegetative growth on established landscape ornamental plantings — Atrimmec, Embark and Cutless Granular.

Embark from PBI/Gordon (active ingredient, mefluidide) suppresses growth by interfering with cell division. This foliar-applied product is also used on turfgrass for shoot growth regulation and seedhead suppression. PBI/Gordon says that the product suppresses growth in ornamentals for up to eight weeks, depending on the species.

Atrimmec, also from PBI/Gordon, contains the active ingredient dikegulac-sodium, which also suppresses growth by interfering with DNA synthesis and cell division. Again, uniform application is required of this foliar-applied product. The company says that Atrimmec suppresses growth for up to 12 weeks, again depending on species and rate applied. It adds that the product enhances the appearance of ornamentals by promoting branching,

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giving shrubs and bushes a fuller, more compact shape.

Cutless Granular, from SePRO Corp., contains the active ingredient flurprimidol, which interferes with the biosynthe-

sis of gibberellic acid (GA), a plant growth hormone responsible for cell elongation and division. Flurprimidol reduces shoot growth and internode length in landscape ornamentals. Cutless Granular is delivered to plants via a granule applied



▲ Many end-users have seen an increase in flowering following applications of Cutless Granular. ► By suppressing vertical shoot growth, plants treated with PGRs exhibit a more compact growth form and often possess darker green foliage

uniformly within the drip line of landscape ornamentals. Granular applications ease worries about spray drift and require only a spreader, so they are easy to use. Cutless Granular has demonstrated growth suppression up to six months, says the company.

Benefits of PGRs

The primary benefit of using a PGR on landscape ornamentals is to manage plant growth to minimize and reduce costs and labor associated with pruning or trimming. PGRs are most effective when applied close to a time of pruning; therefore using a PGR should extend the length of time between future pruning events.

Length of residual growth regulation varies depending on plant species, climate, as well as other factors, including soil type. Therefore, PGRs, will reduce the time and labor involved in pruning and maintenance of landscape ornamentals. Similar results have been duplicated in the field by end-users.

“Our records show that in years past we had an average of 10 to 13 and up to 15 guys on a single bed and trim crew,” says Mark Baker of Baker Landscaping, Delray Beach, FL. “You go out there today; that crew has seven people on it. We may add two more if it gets busy, but those five extra guys add up quick.”

“After the first application I’m saving money, says Mark Boettger of The Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort in Marco Island, FL. “The one application saved me three months of trimming. That’s hourly time. That’s a lot of money. We used to have four guys trimming constantly during the summer months, constantly trimming, trimming, trimming. If we had



In simple math that's approximately \$72,000.

Lastly, the effect on worker safety is also felt when trimming stress and

something pop up it took one guy a couple hours to clean it up."

In addition, research has shown that clipping yields can be reduced, and less trimming means fewer clippings and there are real costs associated with hauling debris away from the job site.

Baker was able to reduce trimming waste by more than 30%, he says.

"You figure 30 or 40 yards a day you don't pay dump fees on, let alone the guy raking it up and humping it to the truck," he says. "It's an overall savings of \$400 per day. Multiply that over six heavy growing months, that's \$400 a day for 180 days."

requirements decrease. "Almost every one of our injuries is the result of somebody being careless with a pair of hedge trimmers," says Baker, a Cutless user. "We haven't had an injury like that in 10 or 11 months. We're just doing less trimming."

With the challenges landscape professionals are facing in today's difficult labor environment, think of PGRs as a labor supplement, not only to make up for labor shortages, but to increase the productivity of trimming/pruning crews. What could your crew be doing instead of pruning? Mark Baker is sold on the advantages of PGRs.

"Every one of our crews has got two buckets of Cutless and two shakers on their truck. We use it on every property, high-end residential routes and commercial properties."

Fortunately, for the landscape professional, there are many tools available for landscapers to regulate the growth of established ornamental shrubs and hedges. When used properly and effectively, they can provide labor savings with the added bonus of more attractive plants in the landscape. **LM**

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