

## CASE STUDY

March 2019

### COMPANY

Mariani Landscape, Chicago, IL

### CONTACT

Frank Mariani, Jr.

### PRODUCTS USED

POLYON Controlled-Release Fertilizer



## CASE STUDY PROFILE

### CHALLENGE

Like many green industry businesses, the Marianis were having a tough time finding employees to design, build and maintain their customers' residential and commercial properties.

### SOLUTION

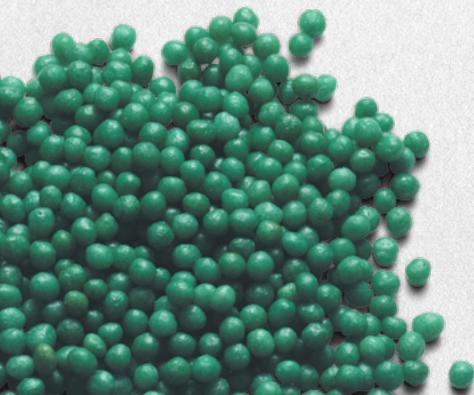
POLYON controlled-release fertilizer

### RESULTS

Mariani Landscape modified its lawn care program to include two applications of a POLYON blend rather than four applications of a different fertilizer product. Their customers' lawns are green and beautiful, and resulting labor savings free up their crews to tackle other tasks.



**POLYON**  
 Controlled-Release Fertilizer



## Chicago's Mariani Landscape Enjoys Performance and Labor Savings With Koch's POLYON® Controlled-Release Fertilizer



Over the past six decades, the name "Mariani Landscape" has come to represent some of the highest quality landscape design and maintenance services available in the Chicagoland area. The company's main facility is located in Lake Bluff, about 30 miles north of the Chicago Loop, nearly halfway between downtown and the Wisconsin border. A branch in Westmont, IL serves the city's western suburbs. That's the branch that Frank Mariani, Jr., grandson of company founder, Vito Mariani, manages today.

"My grandfather started the company about 60 years ago with nine employees," Mariani says. "In the early '70s, my dad, Frank Sr., was getting ready to head to college when my grandfather was diagnosed with leukemia. He told my dad, 'You have your mom and two younger brothers to take care of; you need to learn this landscaping thing and earn some money.'"

Almost exactly a year later, Vito Mariani passed away, leaving his son in charge of the family business. Frank Sr. helped put his younger brother through landscape architecture school at the University of Illinois, and when that brother graduated, he came to work for Mariani Landscape as well, giving the company the ability to not just maintain properties, but also design and install them.

Today, Frank Sr. still works as the company's "rainmaker," developing and nurturing the important relationships that have helped Mariani Landscape grow to two locations with nearly 550 full-time employees during the

season and annual revenues of nearly \$65 million. The company has expanded to include three nurseries, one that grows ball-and-burlap plants, a container nursery that specializes in roses and smaller shrubs, and a third nursery, Hampshire Farms, that grows perennials almost exclusively for Home Depot.

Mariani's landscape division focuses primarily on the design, build and maintenance of high-end residential landscapes. Commercial accounts represent approximately 10 to 20 percent of the company's business today. Those accounts include many businesses owned by Mariani's residential customers, as well as homeowners' associations.

As the manager of Mariani Landscape's branch office, Frank Jr. oversees the maintenance department's production and sales staff. He supervises a production manager, three salespeople and 35 employees – a total of 12 crews that cover residential and commercial maintenance as well as smaller construction projects for maintenance accounts as they arise. Like most companies in the green industry, finding good employees has become a serious challenge for Mariani.

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*“It (POLYON) helps us maintain that nice green color for a longer period of time. It looks just as good as what some might consider a ‘normal’ program, but with far fewer applications and less labor.”*

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“The labor shortage is probably our biggest concern right now, just as it is with every other landscape company owner I’ve spoken with lately,” Frank Jr. says. “I think labor rates in other industries are going up. If we offer someone the same pay that they could make at a less physical, indoor job, they’ll probably choose the indoor job. So, we try to offer the best rates we can afford and hope that sways them in our direction a little bit. We expect our employees to meet a certain standard, and we compensate them for it.”

Mariani Landscape's quality focus affects not only its approach to labor issues, but also to the products it uses in its turf maintenance program. A few years ago, one of Mariani's turf specialists began testing a fertilizer blend that featured POLYON enhanced efficiency fertilizer from Koch Turf & Ornamental (Koch). During testing, the company applied the POLYON blend only to its commercial sites with larger expanses of turf and fewer variables like water quality to affect the fertilizer's performance. Today, Mariani Landscape applies the POLYON blend to all the residential and commercial turf serviced by its main office.

“As long as the POLYON blend's application is done at the right time and at the right rate, it works great,” Mariani says. “It helps us

maintain that nice green color for a longer period of time. It looks just as good as what some might consider a ‘normal’ program, but with far fewer applications and less labor.”

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In the past, Mariani's crews were putting down four applications per year — a spring application with a pre-emergent herbicide, then three more standard applications after that. Now, they're applying the POLYON blend just twice a year.

“It (the POLYON blend) is a little more expensive to purchase up front, but so are we,” Mariani jokes. “It's a better product, and many times, the better product costs more per bag. However, the labor savings more than make up for the initial cost. It also frees my guys up to do other things on our customer sites. They can help on our enhancement crews, perform specialty applications for roses and shrubs, address fungus problems and apply fungicides, for example. That helps our overall product and improves our word of mouth, which is really our primary marketing tactic.”

Like other landscaping and lawn maintenance companies throughout the U.S., Mariani Landscape has been dealing with the issue of sustainable lawn care. The company is taking a proactive approach, educating its crew members so that they know the facts about the chemicals they apply and can speak to their safety when customers ask for information.

“We're putting together a cut sheet that details what products we'll be using on our customers' yards,” Mariani says. “Part of that involves explaining how we're able to apply the POLYON fertilizer blend just twice a year. By being up front, we can put people's minds at ease.”

Of course, while being able to apply less fertilizer and free up crews to tackle other tasks is certainly important, POLYON's performance is the number one reason Mariani chooses to continue using the product.

“If the grass wasn't green, we wouldn't be using the POLYON,” Mariani says. “Performance is the number one factor we look at when we choose a fertilizer. And, of course, the labor efficiencies are huge. Finding good people is harder and harder every day, but this fertilizer is helping us out with this problem.

“It's a good blend of efficiency, performance and sustainability that works for us. I can't think of one downside to using POLYON.”