

Start your own garden service

You can make money by setting up your own garden maintenance service

A garden needs to be taken good care of. Like all living things a garden requires water, needs to be fed and protected from diseases. Although some people would love to attend to their gardens, they just do not have the time to do so. Summer provides a great entrepreneurial opportunity because people want beautiful gardens but are unable to do the maintenance themselves.

If your service is satisfactory, these customers will want to use you again. This way, you will build a relationship with your customer and advertising will be done through word of mouth.

To set up your own garden maintenance service, you will need the correct tools, such as a lawnmower, rake, spade, fork, trowel and shears.

Garden maintenance

Here are a few tips on how to maintain a garden and make money looking after someone else's garden:

- **Water:** It's important to know how much water a garden needs, because different plants require different amounts of water. Try to water the garden in the early mornings or late afternoon as this saves water due to less evaporation.

Plants that are prone to fungal

diseases, such as downy mildew on roses, are best watered in the morning, so that the leaves dry out quickly and do not give the fungus time to grow.

- **Mulch:** Mulch helps to retain moisture in the soil by reducing water lost to evaporation. It also helps to prevent weed growth, supplies your plant with nutrients, and keeps the soil cool in summer and warm in winter. Rather mulch garden beds than dig them over, as digging over leads to a crust formation on the soil surface, which prevents water from soaking in.



Water plants with a watering can in the early mornings and late afternoons. (Pic: Shirley-Carr)



Include bright annuals in the garden.

- **Fertiliser:** You can use organic (natural) fertilisers or chemical fertilisers. An example of an organic fertiliser is composted cow manure. You can also use compost, leaf mould or decomposed leaves.
- **Pruning:** Many plants, such as roses, need to be cut (pruned) at certain times of the year. Pruning is good for your plants' growth as it gets rid of diseased wood and unwanted growth. It also promotes good health and prolongs a plant's life. You can use secateurs or a knife to prune your plants. Make sure it is sharp and disinfected so that it doesn't infect your plants with disease. Clean the secateurs or knife with a solution of bleach and water in between pruning each plant to avoid spreading diseases from one plant to the next.
- **Annuals:** These are great to include in the garden as they don't cost a lot of money, they grow fast and come in beautiful colours when planted in flowerbeds. Group annuals together as they usually need a lot of water, and water them separately from the rest of the garden to save water.
- **Weeding:** Weeds compete with other plants for water and nutrients, and must be removed from the garden to keep the plants healthy and the garden neat.

All about mulch

Mulch is any substance that can be placed on the surface of the soil around plants in order to keep moisture in the soil. There are two types of mulches:

- Organic mulches come from plant and animal sources and are the best sort of mulch as they enrich the soil. For example compost, autumn leaves and grass cuttings. Leave grass cuttings to dry out before sprinkling a thin layer onto the bed as mulch – if the grass is too wet, it can create a slimy clump. It is also best to leave autumn leaves to decompose a bit before using them.
- Inorganic mulches do not break down and enrich the soil, but help keep moisture in the soil. Examples are pebbles and gravel.



Mulch garden beds to keep moisture in the soil. (Pic: Otto)



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Lawn care

Lawns require a great deal of time and maintenance - use this as an opportunity to establish yourself as a regular garden service for your customers. Have your lawnmower serviced regularly - look out for pre-season offers on repairs and new deals at service dealers in your area. A lightweight, compact design is the best choice.

Mowing is the most vital part of maintaining a lawn and should be done correctly in order to achieve the desired effect. The way you mow the lawn will add to its appearance and health. Follow these tips for successful mowing:

- Grass should not be mowed too short as it results in grass being scorched
- Your lawnmower's blades should be kept sharp at all times throughout the mowing season. Remember to keep numerous spare sharp blades at hand.
- Check the mower's oil regularly during mowing season.
- Always drain the petrol and use new fuel.
- Wet grass should not be mowed.
- Keep the lawnmower away from the pavement and keep children and pets away from the yard while mowing.
- Wear appropriate clothing, especially shoes, when mowing the lawn.

Water wise lawn tips

- Mow frequently but lightly in hot, dry weather. If the grass is cut too short, it will be exposed to scorching.
- To conserve water, cut grass at a higher level than usual. Longer grass blades result in deeper roots, and thus more drought tolerance. Trim kikuyu to a height of 4-6cm. Finer grasses (*Cynodon* spp.) can be cut 3-4cm above the ground, whereas cool season evergreen grasses (Shade-Over/All Seasons Evergreen) should be trimmed 5-7cm above the ground.
- Watering deeply encourages deep root growth, which in turn makes the lawn more drought resistant. So water deeply and less often.
- Overwatering does as much harm as too little. It washes nutrients out of the soil and causes shallow root growth. Water lawns only when they need it, and then water deeply. There are two ways of telling when a lawn needs water. Firstly, if the grass blades do not spring back two minutes after being walked on, and secondly, if they take on a subtle bluish tinge.
- Shape the lawn into a shallow saucer (or a series of saucer-shaped areas) in order to retain the rain water from a heavy downpour on the water-thirsty lawn area.
- Consider reducing the lawn area, and replacing it with Water Wise ground covers, paving stones, bark chips or ground covers. Ask your customer whether the existing lawn area really is essential, taking into account their lifestyle.



To conserve water, cut grass at a higher level than usual as longer grass blades result in deeper roots, and thus more drought tolerance. (Pic: Otto)