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Newsleaf

A message from President Ryan Coyle



Fellow ILA Members,
As we close out the second quarter and head into the heart of the summer season, it is a good time to reflect on where we've been and where our industry is headed.

This year certainly got off to a wet start. Across Central

Indiana, we've received approximately 23 inches of rainfall so far, roughly 3 to 4 inches above normal for this point in the year. While the abundance of moisture has created excellent growing conditions and contributed to healthy plant material throughout the region, it has undoubtedly presented challenges for many of our businesses. Installation schedules have been disrupted, project timelines have shifted, and crews have had to navigate around weather delays far more often than we'd prefer.

As we approach the July 4th holiday, many of us are hoping for a stretch of favorable weather that allows us to regain momentum and catch up on projects that have been delayed. The resilience and adaptability demonstrated by landscape professionals across Indiana continue to be one of our industry's greatest strengths.

From a market perspective, the landscape industry remains healthy and steady. While growth may not be as explosive as we've seen in some recent years, most indicators point toward continued mid-to-moderate growth across residential and commercial sectors. Demand remains solid, consumers continue to invest in their outdoor living spaces, and our industry's value proposition has never been stronger.

One trend worth paying close attention to is the growing interest from private equity firms within the landscape sector. Across the country, private equity groups are actively acquiring and investing in landscape companies as they look to build portfolios within our industry. This presents both opportunities and challenges. For some business owners, it may offer a path for growth, succession planning, or eventual exit strategies. For others, it may introduce new competitive dynamics within their markets. As this trend continues to evolve, each company must evaluate whether these opportunities align with its long-term

vision, culture, and business goals. There is no one-size-fits-all answer, but it is certainly a conversation that will become increasingly relevant for landscape business owners in the years ahead.

On a more exciting note, we are looking forward to another outstanding ILA Bus Trip to Tennessee to visit Landmark Porcelain Tile. This annual trip provides a unique opportunity to see firsthand how one of the fastest-growing premium products in our industry is designed and manufactured. Porcelain continues to gain traction as a high-performance solution for outdoor living spaces, and understanding its applications, production process, and future potential helps all of us better serve our clients. Beyond the educational value, these trips provide excellent opportunities to network, exchange ideas, and strengthen the relationships that make our association so valuable.

As we look ahead to the third quarter, I encourage every member to take time to evaluate the health of their business. The halfway point of the year is an ideal opportunity to review financial performance, assess operational efficiency, evaluate staffing needs, and identify areas for improvement. At the same time, it is important to remain aware of the rapid growth, innovation, and evolving trends shaping our industry. Whether it's new materials, emerging technologies, workforce development, or changing consumer expectations, the businesses that continue learning and adapting will be best positioned for long-term success.

Thank you for your continued support of the Indianapolis Landscape Association and for the professionalism you bring to our industry every day. I look forward to seeing many of you on the upcoming Tennessee trip and throughout the remainder of what promises to be a productive and rewarding year. Wishing you a safe, successful, and prosperous summer season.

Ryan Coyle,
Vive Exterior Design/Artisan Outdoor Craftsman

President
Indianapolis Landscape Association



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What's Growing On: Popular Plant Trends for Spring 2026

From foliage-first perennials to a new wave of compact hydrangeas, here's what's moving in Central Indiana landscapes and garden centers this season.

By Dan Wasson, ILA Board of Directors · with insights from Jocelyn Bonesteel, Corporate Buyer (Green Goods)

Every spring tells us something about where our clients' tastes are heading, and 2026 has been a telling one. To take the pulse of the season, I went straight to the person who watches it most closely — our Green Goods buyer, Jocelyn Bonesteel — and lined her observations up against what the major breeders are rolling out nationally. The two tell the same story: gardeners and designers want long-season interest, easy care, and plants that earn their place. Here's what's moving here in Central Indiana (USDA Zone 6) this year.

What's Trending

- **Foliage is the new flower.** The biggest shift is toward leaf color and texture for low-maintenance, all-season interest — color that doesn't quit when the blooms fade. Jocelyn is seeing strong pull on Coral Bells (Heuchera) in tones like Wild Rose, Peach



Flambé, Peachberry Ice, and Caramel, alongside ornamental grasses such as Karl Foerster, Cheyenne Sky switchgrass, Chameleon little bluestem, and Everillo sedge. The breeders agree: dark and dramatic foliage is a defining theme of the 2026 introductions.

- **Natives and “nativars” go mainstream.** Demand has moved well beyond milkweed. Customers are

asking for Rattlesnake Master, Major Wheeler honeysuckle, Prairie Smoke, and Serviceberry — and, importantly, for shade-tolerant natives like Anemone, Columbine, and Turtlehead. Nationally, native gardening has crossed from niche to mainstream, and improved native cultivars now make up a large and growing share of the shrub catalog, giving us better habit and color without abandoning pollinator value.

- **Loyalty to color, not variety.** As Jocelyn puts it, if it's pretty and in bloom, it goes in the cart. Retail customers are buying the look first and the label second — a useful reminder for how we merchandise and how we present plant palettes to design clients.

- **Plants that solve problems.** There's real appetite for varieties bred for real gardens: rebloomers and longer bloomers (daylilies, lilacs, spirea), denser and more compact habits that fit smaller spaces, and tougher plants that tolerate a wider range of site conditions. This mirrors the breeders' stated focus for 2026 — heat tolerance, compact size, and weather resilience.

- **A new wave of hydrangeas.** “Hydrangea-land” keeps expanding. Jocelyn is watching new introductions including Eclipse, Pop Star, the Gatsby line, Flowerful, Dream Cloud, and Incrediball Storm Proof. Several are marquee 2026 releases — Eclipse is the first true dark-leaf bigleaf hydrangea, Pop Star is the newest quick-reblooming Endless Summer selection, and Incrediball Storm Proof was bred for strong, sturdy stems that hold up their big blooms.



Reliable Staples Still Selling Strong



Trends come and go, but the dependable performers keep moving. Jocelyn points to catmint (Chartreuse on the Loose), allium (Millenium, Serendipity, Windy City), and compact panicle hydrangeas — shorter selections like Firelight

Tidbit and Little Lime Punch, plus the “Prime” series (Limelight Prime, Pinky Winky Prime, Quick Fire Fab). For structure and screening, upright evergreens remain steady: Spartan and Blue Point juniper, Norway spruce, and Green Giant arborvitae.

Cooling Off

Not everything is on the upswing. Two former staples are seeing softer demand this year: clematis

and roses. It’s a useful signal for purchasing and for the palettes we put in front of clients — these may be worth a lighter hand in 2026 designs.

The Takeaway for Our Members

The throughline this spring is value over novelty: plants that look good longer, ask for less, and hold up to our weather. Whether you’re stocking a garden center or designing a high-end install, leaning into foliage interest, well-chosen natives, and the new generation of compact, reblooming shrubs is a safe bet for the season. My thanks to Jocelyn Bonesteel for sharing her front-line read on what our customers are actually reaching for.

Sources: Front-line buying observations from Jocelyn Bonesteel (Wasson Green Goods); 2026 trend and new-variety reporting from Proven Winners, Bailey Nurseries, Walters Gardens, The Old Farmer’s Almanac, and Garden Gate.

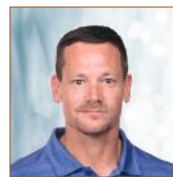


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Newsleaf

Hire an Agent That Never Sleeps: Using Claude and Cowork to Run Your Shop

By Dan Wasson
Newsleaf Committee Chair



Most of us have tried a chatbot by now. You type a question, it types back an answer, and that's the end of it. Useful, but limited — like having a smart assistant who can only talk and never actually does anything. The real shift happening right now is the move from chatbots to what the industry calls AI agents. An agent doesn't just answer; it takes the job, works through the steps, and hands you back something finished. I've started using one in my own shop, and it has changed how I spend my day.

What “Using Claude as an Agent” Means

Claude is the AI assistant built by Anthropic. On its own it's already strong at writing and thinking. But Anthropic also makes a desktop tool called Cowork that lets Claude act as an agent right on your computer — working with the files, spreadsheets, and email you already use. You point it at a folder or connect it to your inbox, give it a job in plain English, and it does the legwork: opens the spreadsheet, pulls the numbers, writes the document, drafts the emails, and puts the finished work back for you to review. You're not copying and pasting anymore. You're delegating.

My Real Example: Running Aspire Just by Asking

Here's the one that sold me. Like a lot of you, we run our whole operation in Aspire — scheduling, work tickets, estimates, job costing, the works. Claude can connect directly to my Chrome browser, which means it can see and operate

Aspire the same way I do, right there on the screen. Instead of clicking through five menus, I just tell it what I need.

I say: “Pull up this week's open opportunities in Aspire and tell me which proposals are still unsigned.” It navigates the screens, reads the list, and gives me the answer.

Or: “Find the Reynolds contract in Aspire and tell me the contract value and start date.” Done — without me touching the keyboard.

The key is that I'm still the one in control. It works inside my own logged-in browser, I watch what it does, and I approve anything that matters before it's final. It's like having an assistant sitting at my computer who already knows where everything is — only it never gets tired and never has to ask twice.

Other Ways to Put It to Work This Week

The inbox: “Summarize everything that came in overnight, flag what needs my answer today, and draft replies to the three most important.”

Your numbers: “Read this month's financial package and tell me in plain English what changed versus last month and what I should watch.”

Collections: “Open the A/R aging report, find every account over 60 days above \$2,000, and draft a friendly collection email for each.”

Estimating: “Here are my walk-through notes — regrade back yard, 400 sq ft paver patio, 12 shrubs, new irrigation zone. Turn them into a clean, itemized scope of work.”

HR: “Write a bilingual crew-leader job posting and a new-hire onboarding checklist.”

Set It and Forget It

An agent can also run on a schedule. I have Cowork put together a short briefing every morning before I'm in the truck — what's on my calendar, who emailed that needs an answer, and what the weather means for the crews. I didn't build anything technical. I asked for it once and told it to run every day.

The Whole Industry Is Moving — Meet LeanScaper

This isn't just big-tech tools finding their way into our world. The green industry is building its own. LeanScaper is an AI platform made specifically for landscape companies, built on the operating system used to scale one of North America's top firms. Instead of one general assistant, it gives you a whole team of specialized agents — for operations, finance, marketing, and HR — that already speak our language.

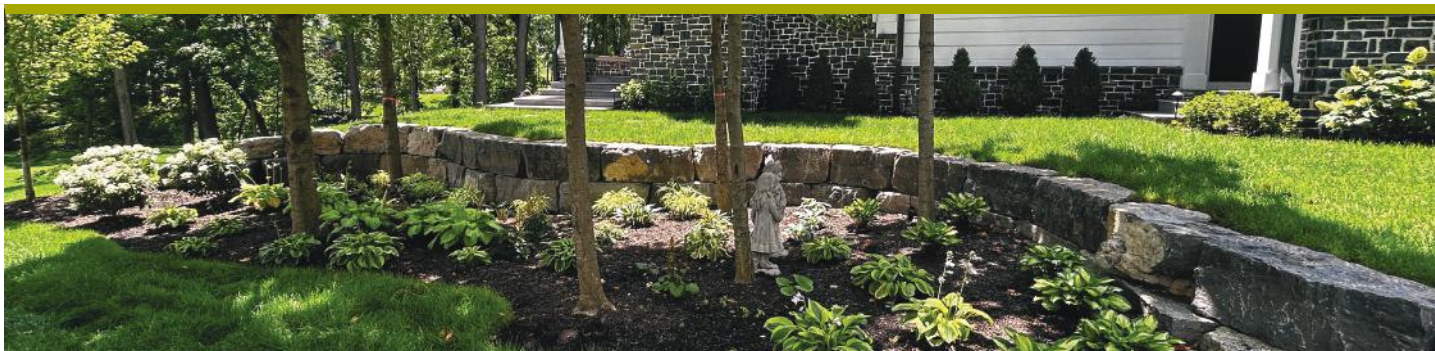
A couple of their ideas stand out. Their assistant, Lana, is the single point everyone talks to, and she coordinates the other agents behind the scenes. Their Huddle Agent is the one I'd watch: a crew lead records the morning huddle on a phone, and minutes later you have a written summary — the wins to celebrate, the equipment issues routed to the shop board, and the material request already on its way to purchasing. They also connect to your QuickBooks data so a CFO agent can help with forecasting and financial decisions. It's the same agent idea I described above, purpose-built for how we actually run a landscape business.

Two Ground Rules

First, you're still the boss. An agent produces fast, high-quality drafts and handles tasks quickly, but it can be wrong — so watch what it does and read what it gives you before anything goes out with your name on it. Second, be thoughtful with sensitive client and employee information and use business-grade tools; because Cowork works on your own machine, in your own logged-in systems, it's a sensible place to start.

The Bottom Line

You don't need to be technical and you don't need a big budget. You need one task that drains your week — for most of us it's the inbox, the bidding, or the clicking around inside our software — and a willingness to hand it off and check the result. Used well, an agent like Claude gives a busy owner back the scarcest thing we have: time to be out front of the business instead of buried in it.



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Don't Skip Rental Reimbursement: A \$15,000 Lesson

When a machine goes down mid-job, the rental bill to finish the work can run into five figures. Make sure your policy covers it.

By Dan Wasson, Newsleaf Committee Chair
with Pat O'Brien, Commercial Risk Advisor, EPIC
Insurance Brokers

Most of us insure the equipment we own against damage. Far fewer of us think about what it costs to keep a job moving while a damaged machine is being replaced. That gap is where rental reimbursement matters — and here is a scenario that shows why.

The Scenario

A company is in the middle of a large installation at a residential property. The job requires a skid steer loader the company owns, parked on site for roughly four months. Midway through, a storm rolls through with high winds. A tree limb snaps, lands on the loader, and damages it beyond use.

The work doesn't stop, so the owner rents a replacement at \$5,000 per month while the claim is sorted out. That runs three

months — \$15,000 in rental fees, on top of the loss of the machine itself. After inspection, the carrier declares the loader a total loss. Because the right coverage was in place, the equipment is replaced and all \$15,000 in rental fees is reimbursed.

The Takeaway: Confirm Your Rental Reimbursement

That outcome wasn't luck — it was coverage. The equipment portion is the part most owners assume they have. Rental reimbursement is the part that gets overlooked, and it is often the bigger number. A machine that's down for three months can cost more to rent around than the deductible on the machine itself.

So ask yourself: if this happened on one of your sites tomorrow, would your policy cover the rental cost of keeping the job on schedule? Don't guess. Call your insurance broker this week and confirm three things — that each piece of equipment you own is covered, that it's insured at today's replacement cost, and that you carry rental reimbursement when a machine has to be pulled out of service.

A fifteen-minute conversation now is a lot cheaper than finding the gap after the limb has already fallen.

Have Questions About Your Coverage?

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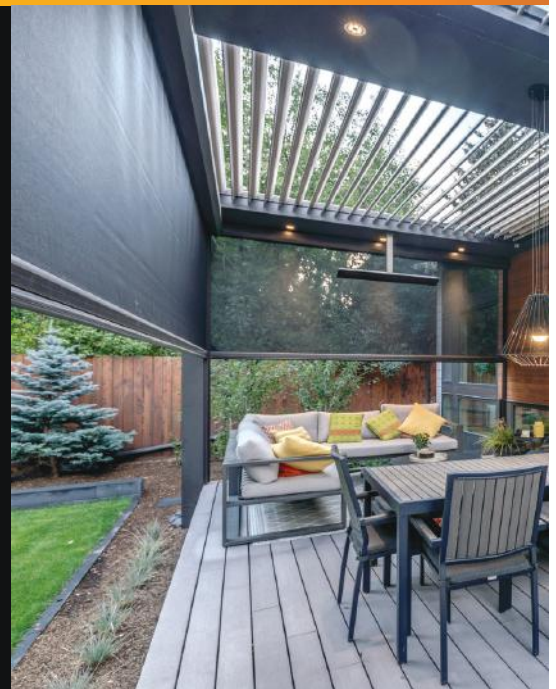
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Tree Identification Quiz



Consulting Arborist Corner

Judson R. Scott

Registered Consulting Arborist

Think you've got your tree identification skills dialed in?

Imagine this: a client calls because they're being sued for removing a neighbor's tree. As an industry professional, could you confidently identify the species from photos, bark, leaves, or branches?

Put your knowledge to the test with our Tree ID Challenge. For each photo below, decide whether the identification provided is correct or not. Some are easy, some are tricky, and a few may make you second-guess yourself.

Good luck—and no peeking at your field guide until you're finished! **(Answers on back cover)**

1. This tree is an Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*)?
True False



2. This tree is a red maple (*Acer rubrum*)?
True False



The "Consulting Arborist Corner" series provided by Jud Scott, who is a lover of trees and history. If you need help preserving a tree or resolving a tree conflict, Jud can be reached at 317-815-8733 or by email at Jud@arboristexpert.com.

3. This tree is an American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*)?
True False



4. This is a tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)?
True False



5. This is a Norway spruce (*Picea abies*) bough?
True False



6. This is an American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*) tree?
True False



7. This is a white oak (Quercus alba) tree?
True False



8. This is a flakey barked cucumber tree?
True False



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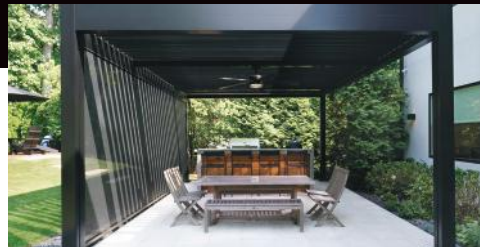
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Answers to Tree Identification Quiz: (page 18)

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