

ROBIN HOOD LANDSCAPING

HITS THE BULL'S-EYE

When the owner's last name is Hood, and there are trees involved, it's not surprising to find they have a product line named after England's hero of old. And like that clever namesake, there is more to Robin Hood Garden and Landscape Products than meets the commoner's eye. What started simply as Hood Farms now encompasses a timber harvesting and land-clearing company, landscaping services, commercial products (they make their own, and even have two bagging operations and a sawmill), and wood preserving.

"I went from farming and crop spraying to timber, then went from timber to the mulch business," says Leon Hood, President, Hood Timber and Landscape Products, Inc., Adel, Georgia, with a smile.

Once Leon got into timber, it was a logical progression. From timber harvesting comes a lot of scrap that could be turned into barks, mulches, and soils. So Leon took the step of purchasing a tub grinder, and started supplying others who turned those bulk items into finished products. But in 1993, Leon set up operations in Adel, building his own commodity bark and soil production facility so he could create his own finished products.

"We were the first to have a dyeing machine," recalls Leon. "Nobody had ever colored bark before. This was about 10

years ago. It didn't sell too good at first; we were about to give up and sell off the machine. But we decided to keep it." And it's a good thing.

Once buyers from Lowe's® Atlanta stores found him in the late 1990s, Leon tried to persuade the buyer to give the red bark a shot. After some hemming and hawing, the buyer agreed, and sales of the dyed bark and other products took off. Lowe's would order 600 to 800 items every week. The craziest it ever got was when they received 327 purchase orders in a single day.

But when it comes to that red bark, as Leon points out, everybody does it now. But they were the first.

MIXING IT UP

Hustling from job to job on the grounds is a Kawasaki 65ZV-2. From hoppers to dirt to dump trucks, the Kawasaki loader shrugs off the dust, the wood chips, and the southern Georgia heat and humidity.

The company has owned other brands, and still does, but the operators all like the Kawasaki the best. "It's a good loader with strong hydraulics," reports Leon after surveying his crew. "They put the Kawasaki ahead of the John Deere. And that first Hyundai loader we bought still has the

original tires on it — it hasn't run good enough to wear the tires out. It broke down a lot and the operators just didn't like it."

Products sold under the Robin Hood label include potting mix, pine bark mulch and nuggets, colored mulch and nuggets, top soil, compost, cypress mulch, hardwood mulch, bark soil conditioner, composted cow manure, and organic peat humus. The sawmill allows him to rip custom cuts, and the wood preserving plant can treat several types of wood — like cypress, pine, hardwood, dry kiln, and pallets.

When timber prices are low, Leon buys from other contract loggers and the mills. When pricing goes up, they harvest and mill their own logs from their timber operation. The Adel operation also has several bagging lines. Another one, completely automated, was established in nearby Nashville. That brings the company's capacity to over 800,000 bagged products a week.

Thanks to the high demand for his products, Leon has also added a trucking company, distributing goods as far north as Ohio.

Efficiency, well-planned production, and excellent access to raw materials reinforces the company slogan of "We can do it for less." And their Kawasaki wheel loader is happy to be a part of Robin Hood's band.



When timber prices are high the company harvests wood from its own logging property.



The company's popular red bark first made its appearance about 10 years ago.



Bags of product are palletized awaiting shipment.