

## HOME ELECTRONICS

## Satellite TV services offer program packages



BARRY JENSEN

Last week we talked about RCA's new 18-inch television antenna. Actually, it's more than a dish. The system involves digital signals received from a satellite, not over the air or from a cable. You buy not only the dish but a black box to convert what you receive from a satellite

into programming.

No matter how nifty a television system is, it isn't worth a thing without some programming to watch. A computer needs software; a TV set needs programming.

If you buy the system, you can also buy, through RCA, 120 channels for \$61 a month, said Bill Scarfone of Scott Shruptrine, which sells the hardware necessary to set up a digital satellite system (the real name of the 18-inch antenna and associated hardware).

There are two other major distributors of programming for a digital satellite system: DirecTV or United States Satellite Broadcasting.

DirecTV, a unit of GM Hughes Elec-

tronics, offers its basic package of 30 channels, including ESPN and CNN, for \$22.

USSB, which is a subsidiary of Hubbard Broadcasting, sells its basic package for \$8. You can get many premium channels in addition to the basic package for \$35 a month. These fees do not include pay-per-view channels, which are offered by both distributors.

The RCA little dish sounds good, especially in suburbs where a six-foot-wide dish may be ugly or illegal or both. But DirecTV and USSB won't sell you network programming if you could get it from a cable system or over the air. That leaves out most of us.

So the choice is yours: broadcast, cable or the newest entry in the list: the digital satellite system. The existence of the new mini-antenna gives the consumer just another choice in the world of electronic information exchange.

Barry Jensen welcomes your comments and suggestions for topics for future columns. His telephone number is 313-953-2125. This number has voice mail attached, so you can call at any time.

## To keep yards healthy you need the right tools

While chemical-free, organic gardening may take a little extra time and effort, many home gardeners have discovered that the long-term benefits of safety and a healthier environment are worth the added investment. Among the companies working to meet the demand for products designed to keep the yard healthy and lush without chemicals or pollutants is Ryobi. From the experts at Ryobi come the following tips for a safe and beautiful front yard.

The first step is to make sure you have the raw material to work with. Your lawn may need a little help maintaining the right pH level, between 6.3 and 7.0. Conditioning the soil with limestone will help correct any imbalance.

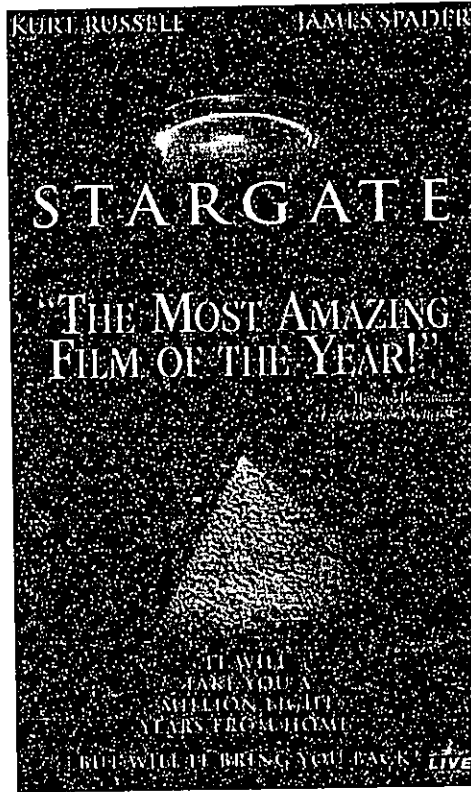
Water your lawn once a week to a depth of two to three inches to supplement the regular rainfall. This will encourage deeper root growth that will, in turn, help your lawn withstand a drought or other severe weather conditions. Watering in the morning is best to minimize runoff and evaporation.

Once your lawn is up and growing, the next step is to get out the mower. Look for a sturdy, durable and reliable mower. Many do-it-yourself homeowners are turning to a new kind of mulching mower called the Mulchinator. Because it is powered by a 24-volt battery that recharges overnight, it starts at the

touch of a button, and runs in virtual silence. The battery will work up to 1-1/4 hours on a single charge, which is perfect for a lawn of up to half an acre. It's a good idea to mow when the grass is completely dry, and try not to cut off more than one-third of the blade. When you're done, make sure that the clippings aren't sticking together in clumps, which would mean the grass was too wet. If the tips of the grass blades turn white, that would signal that it's time to sharpen your mower blade.

The next step is to maintain your yard, and to do so means arming yourself with the right tools. Adding a trimmer to your stock of outdoor power equipment is a great start. Your trusty mower is a handy ally, but a mower can only do so much. A trimmer will take care of those touches that most notably improve the appearance of a yard. The multiuse TrimmerPlus 970r from Ryobi runs on a powerful, advanced four-cycle engine that meets all proposed environmental regulations through 1999. This new engine doesn't require the mixing of oil and gas, which cuts out the smoky, oily exhaust that is dangerous for the environment. The TrimmerPlus is actually a system of tools that can be attached to the TrimmerPlus base. This means you can easily turn your trimmer into an edger, cultivator, blower, vacuum or tree pruner.

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