

# Landscape Maintenance



## Caption

This is a reworked image of a business card for Juan Zárate's gardening maintenance company. J&J Landscaping operated out of his Santa Ana home for over twenty-five years. One of the hundreds of formal and informal gardening companies throughout Orange County, the business card sought to distinguish the company through services offered. An image of a chainsaw originally complemented the ficus tree found on the left of the card. It has been replaced with the chemical compound for glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup weed killer. Throughout his decades-long work as a residential gardener, Zárate used Roundup to provide the services his employers demanded and to make his business more efficient. From carrying glyphosate on his back and over his work clothes, to operating it without protective gloves or a mask, Roundup was a common tool, a finishing touch to the gardens for which he cared. Recent legal cases against Bayer, parent company of Monsanto Co., have found them liable for defendants' development of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, caused by prolonged exposure to glyphosate. Legal decisions have highlighted Monsanto's failure to adequately explain and advertise the dangers of glyphosate to farm workers, gardeners, and groundskeepers, who are regularly exposed to the chemical.

Zárate, Salvador. 2019. "Landscape Maintenance."

In "Toxic Softscapes: On Entries, Bodies, and Plants." In *Visualizing Toxic Subjects*, curated by James Adams and Kim Fortun. The Center for Ethnography. May.

<https://tinyurl.com/y2kxg7ry>



## Design Statement

Visualizing toxic subjects through Juan Zárate's business card reveals the scalar impact of toxics in Southern California's gardening economy. While the images and services on the card highlight garden products (trees) and the performative aspects of gardening labor, an ethnographic reading for toxicity indexes how toxics linger in human and plant worlds. The business card pushes us to consider what is not visible: the toxics that remain on the bodies of gardeners and in the life-worlds of their employees and employers (homeowners). It has us confront how gardens, meant to invoke introspection and well-being for consumers with their beauty, dovetail with racialized workers' exposure to life-ending toxics.

## Project Statement

This photo essay theorizes the permeability of geopolitical, fleshy, and floronic borders through toxicity and racialized labor. It centers toxic materials (DDT & glyphosate) in the labor of Juan Zárate, the father of this submission's author. Given that toxicity is dissipative and accumulative, burrowing but not self-contained, this ethnographic visualization of a toxic subject is bound to toxic confrontations found in the manipulation, alienation, primping, and desiccation of plant life across the span of one person's life. This project reveals how toxic subjection is historical and ongoing, coheres for racialized and gendered bodies, and troubles notions of liberal (laboring) subjecthood premised on bodily individuation.

Toxic Softscapes