Mulch it up

BY CURT HARLER

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Mulching mowers are rotary mowers designed to keep the clippings circulating under the mower deck so the blades of grass will be chopped into finer pieces.

Some newer mowers have special features that facilitate mulching, including multiple rippled blades and dome-shaped decks.

Most commercial mower manufacturers offer mulching kits for their mowers. These are plates that block discharge shoots and force the clippings back through the blades to assure they become a fine mulch.

Mulching mowers are part of the answer to the landfill space crunch facing America. An analysis of residential waste composition in Cincinnati, OH, shows that yard debris accounted for nearly 20% of the total. A study in Plano, TX (population 80,000) reveals over 700 tons of grass clippings were collected and disposed of in landfills each week.

In addition to demand for landfill space, collection and disposal of this waste material is expensive, notes Dr. Peter J.

Get an edge

It's one thing to sharpen a mower blade properly. It's another thing to keep a sharp edge on that blade.

The best answer today appears to be Marbain mower blades. Several manufacturers now tout products which offer Marbain. Among them are Cub Cadet Commercial, Gravely, Great Dane, Raptor and Scag.

Competitors agree there's a marked advantage to this newest technology. Blades made with Marbain-treated steel, a proprietary heat treatment process, are extremely hard, yet not brittle.
In fact, their 50 Rockwell Hardness rating is 25% to 50% harder than blades found on standard mowers.

The process improves blades' metallurgical properties. The yield strength (or amount of force needed to deform the blade edge) is increased, and this gives the blade greater impact toughness and improved wear resistance. As a result, the blades hold their edges longer.

These new blades are tough but not bulky. With the Marbain process, one produces a lighter blade material. The metal's actual weight or density isn't changed. But it's possible to make a blade thinner and therefore lighter given its better properties, according to Cub Cadet product line manager Ken Speece. That means less work for the mower engine.

Marbain blades are no more difficult to sharpen if standard power grinding wheel techniques are used, but would be tougher to do with a hand file.

The material is effective both for mulching blades and regular mower blades.