

HUGH TILLEY looks at sweepers,
leaf and litter collectors

Let's get this place CLEANED-UP



The ever popular Turf Tidy by Charterhouse

THE MACHINERY available for cleaning litter, leaves and grass is almost as diverse as the situations for which it is required, with each machine having its own particular strengths and weaknesses. The range extends from lightweight blowers through brush sweepers to vacuum collectors and from push models through the many tractor mounted or trailed implements to self-propelled machinery.

After a brush or rake, the most basic form of sweeper is the pedestrian operated push type (lawn) sweeper costing about £100. This simple device has a horizontal rotary brush driven by the wheels and collects debris in a canvas or similar collector. Whilst satisfactory for sweeping leaves or litter from small areas of turf or paths it has its limits – and time and effort are prime amongst them. The next stage in mechanisation is the same device but trailed by a ride-on, lawn or compact tractor. Obviously more expensive, but significantly less laborious and with greater output, such designs are available in widths up to about 5ft. However there are again limitations in use, for instance because they are driven by the wheels with a fixed ratio of brush rotation to forward motion, often causing difficulty in picking up heavy accumulations of wet leaves. Use of the height adjustment and making several passes usually results in an acceptable job, though this negates most of the economies of labour-saving machinery.

There are other options – like using a ride-on rotary with a collector. Many of these operate extremely efficiently having good suction built-in, usually because they have a separate suction fan. Buying a collector for an existing ride-on in your stable may prove an economic answer.

Going upmarket, to about £4,000, should provide a PTO driven sweeper/collector, or if sweeping is restricted to turf alone, perhaps a flail mower/collector of similar design will offer greater flexibility for other use. Hard surfaces with loose stone precludes the use of mowers – at least as primary collectors – although they may be able to collect from a heap or row.

However there are other relatively inexpen-

sive options for hard surfaces and these can usually be used on short grass. These include blowers and simple angled rotary brushes. Blowers, particularly lightweight models costing from about £250, are particularly effective at flushing leaves and light litter from under bushes and from the inevitable nooks and crannies around buildings. These 'air brooms' still leave a need to collect the debris and whilst many of them can be converted to vacuum, they are generally of limited capacity and dislike anything soggy. Of course with biodegradable materials such as leaves and grass it may be sufficient to simply remove them from turf, path or car park to a position where they can remain as mulch. If collection is essential then it is possible to windrow for collection by another type of machine.

The simple linkage mounted PTO driven angled brush, together with its derivatives, is more vigorous and efficient at moving all types of debris. What and how it will move depends on the strength of the bristles and how well it can be set. Given the right brushes, it should even be possible to clean mud off roads or stones from turf. Like the blower, it should be restricted in dry weather because it makes the dust fly. It is possible (and not difficult) to fit water spray bars to most rotary sweepers and some makers offer

it as an option – but it is not a DIY job. Water sprays add to both cost and complication and perhaps the worst of these complications is caused by failure to empty the water before a frost. With any mechanical brush it is important that setting height and replacing worn brushes is both quick and easy.

Industrial manufacturers offer various grades of bristle according to use demanded and these can include steel and nylon as well as bass and mixed fibres. It may also be possible to fit paddles, which work particularly well on cans, bottles and mud – ideal after a tournament invasion perhaps – though → 16

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15 ⇒ wholly turf oriented machines may not have such options. If there is a lot of brushing to be done then consider fitting the brush to a loader or front linkage – it's more manoeuvrable and saves the operator's neck.

The next stage in sophistication and price is the brush collector combination. There are a number of such machines specifically designed for turf, these being produced in Britain or imported by well known companies. The buyer should also be aware that there are a number of quite similar machines which are no less effective on turf, these being produced for industrial or environment use. Assuming they are to be used on turf, one important point to consider is the GP – does the prospective machine have sufficient ground pressure? This is where most industrial designs fail.

Another point to ponder is the capacity of the collector. Flail cut grass produces bulk but little weight, thus you may fill the collector within very few yards and then have to travel miles to tip! In contrast, soggy leaves and soil cores weigh heavily and may jeopardise the stability of a tractor mounted machine. Many models can 'high tip' into a trailer and this may counteract lower capacity. Beware of claims that a

machine mulches and thus packs more into its collector, for mulched material can be less dense. Of greater importance is the power of the fan and the filler chute.

Flail mower/collectors may be available with a range of flails which include scarifier flails to allow easy cutting and collecting of thatch in one operation. These machines can cope happily with small branches and twigs.

In contrast, vacuum collectors seldom cope well with such material, though they are becoming increasingly popular, especially for litter picking. If your course is one where 'events' take place they may well be worth consideration. The trailed models are likely to be most popular for golf courses because of large capacity and ready availability of a tractor. A flexible wander hose attachment is perhaps more important than the ground head, however it must either be light or balanced by the boom, of suitable length and diameter and with some form of suction control from the nozzle, such as a slide, to admit air above the intake. Any ground head should have quick and easy control of height, preferably from a tractor seat – a modification which is normally easy to make. Some makers can also supply a brush sweeper to enhance the vacuum head.

Flotation tyres suitable for turf are essential but may not be the normal fitment, however it is the overall weight which can be carried on the wheels which is important. Self-propelled ride-on and pedestrian operated vacuum sweepers with brushes are also readily available, but with few exceptions are more applicable to hard surfaces.

Thus to obtain a clean sweep the first requirement is to define the areas and debris which need gathering, this long before selecting a suitable type for demonstration. Asking colleagues of their experience using specific machines costs little more than a 'phone call yet can save an expensive mistake. Half the hassle of getting a machine which does not do the job is the frustration in knowing too late that you selected the wrong machine in the first place.




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