

Specialty

Roland Taylor looks at the machinery that is available to tackle those specialist jobs.

Recently, flicking through an exhibition catalogue, it was clear that for virtually every manual type of operation that is needed to keep a golf course, estate or garden in top condition there is now a machine to carry out the work.

Winter is for many a time of renovation, refurbishing and clearing up after Mother Nature has done her worst. Having machinery for doing a specific task saves time and makes the job far easier and more pleasant to carry out.

Pumps (portable)

With the high rainfalls we now have in this country, flash flooding is becoming quite common and the removal of unwanted water a fairly regular task for many. There are plenty of pumps on the market, but how portable are they? If you are having to manhandle a pump on your own then its weight is going to be foremost in your mind, especially when carrying it over long distance. So, it is important to check the weight and dimensions (the addition of fuel needs to be taken into account) before making a choice.

There are other specifications also to consider. In emergencies the flow rate should be top of the list so that the removal of unwanted water off the site is as fast as possible. The distance from source to where you want to dump it will have a bearing on size. There is very likely to be another problem that the pump is going to have to deal with - the water will be full of foreign matter. A pump that can handle both liquids and solids is the best option. Continually having to unblock filters in freezing water is not a job anyone would relish. A self-priming trash pump can effectively move large volumes of water containing sludge, sand and solids. The size of the solids they can handle can be as large as 40mm. If a unit is going to be left unattended then it should have safety features to protect it. If the water source dries up will the pump run dry without damaging it? As far as the engine is concerned an



oil guard needs to be fitted to stop it in the event of the oil level dropping to a dangerous low. There are plenty of pumps on the market that meet all these requirements.

Digging holes

Whether it is planting trees or putting up fences when, it comes to making holes you can throw away the spade. Earth augers are the answer and take all the backache out of creating a hole. They come as portable, one or two-man units or as an attachment for a tractor or skidsteer and are available in a wide range of diameters and depths.

As one manufacturer says there is an art to creating a hole with an auger and they advise that it should be done in stages rather than a straight bore. Where trees are being planted the

sides and bottom of the hole need to be loosened, so the roots of the tree can easily grow into the surrounding soil. This is especially important where clay is present.

Woodland work

At this time of the year there is every chance of wind damage and branches often get torn down or are left hanging dangerously. Clearing this up does not always warrant the cost of bringing in a specialist, so there are occasions when it has to be dealt with in-house. Chainsaws will take care of any large diameter branches on the ground. For the smaller branches caught in the tree there are manually operated or power driven pole pruners. These are especially useful as they are operated by one person and eliminate the use of ladders, which

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would require another member of staff to be in attendance for safety reasons.

An engine driven pole pruner is basically a 10" chainsaw head that is driven through a telescopic shaft, which can be extended, to any length up to about 5 metres. The units are said to be light and easy to handle and more importantly the operator keeps his feet firmly on the ground.

Other extendable equipment now available includes long reach hedge trimmers. The cutterbar can be set to an angle and the length of the extension shaft varies depending on the model. In addition to hedges these are especially useful for trimming tall shrubs and evergreens.

For those courses that include areas of woodland, clearing dead bracken and undergrowth is likely to be necessary at some stage and for this the answer is a heavy-duty brushcutter or clearing saw. In recent years there have been a number of ride-on brushcutters coming onto the market. These units have a wide cutting width and can speed up the operation considerably. Some models are said to cope with saplings up to 4cm in diameter and reduce the vegetation to mulch.

The hand-held units are especially useful for areas where access is limited. On very rough terrain the back-pack versions are a better



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proposition. With clearing saws there is generally a choice of interchangeable heads that will deal with grass, undergrowth and saplings.

Old tree stumps can be a problem as they usually take years to rot away. The answer in their case is a stump grinder. If the diameter is relatively small then a hand-operated model will be suitable. For larger ones there are the bigger pedestrian machines. They are easy to use and will quickly grind the stump down to well below the surface and out of sight.

Trenches

When it comes to laying new drainage pipes, water or electrical supplies, a mechanical trencher is the answer. For a larger operation there are tractor attachments available, but on short runs a pedestrian unit or one fitted to a mini skidsteer type of machine might be more practical. These units are capable of taking out a 12" wide and over 36" deep trench, fast.

As many of the tasks mentioned here are one-off situations it is worth considering short-term hire as a more cost-effective solution.

If labour resources are limited or time is short then mechanisation can provide the answer, so it is worth investigating what is available locally to either buy or hire.

