

Autumn EQUIPMENT

Roland Taylor looks at the perennial problem brought about by the autumn

It is that time of the year again, when Mother Nature has the last laugh and lets us know that she is still in charge. This time it is leaves. Without them we would not exist and they greatly contribute to the landscape at this colourful, time of year. They are a nuisance, especially if they are wet, plus very time consuming to deal with, at a period of the year when there are plenty of other clearing up, rejuvenating and renovating, jobs to be carried out. The biggest problem with leaves is predicting when they will fall.

This year the trees in my garden began shedding their foliage from the end of August, while in other years it has been well into October. One hard frost can change all this. The best solution, in this situation, is preparation and having the right equipment readily available. This generally means an assortment of machinery, each one for dealing with a specific area.

Some existing machinery such as rotary and flail mowers that have a collection facility, can be used for a leaf clearing operation. These machines are generally only suitable for picking up leaves and other debris, off grass. With the smaller models the collecting capacity can be irritatingly limited, resulting in continually having to empty bag, box or collector. Larger machines with a high lift emptying facility are more suited to this task, as the leaves can easily be emptied either onto a heap or into a receptacle such as a skip. While, these types of units do perform relatively well, a better proposition is to have purpose built tractor-mounted or towed leaf and litter



collectors, especially on the fairways and other wide-open areas. One of the reasons is their hopper capacity and easy emptying systems and work output. At the heart of most systems designed for collecting debris, is an impeller that creates an airflow, which in turn creates a vacuum. These and the housing they are in, have to be aerodynamically designed for the system to work efficiently. The material is sucked in and then blown out. In the process it has to pass through the impeller, were in most cases it is finely chopped, thus reducing its volume. There is however a disadvantage with this type of system. Often, foreign matter such as stone, sand and in the case of litter; bottles and cans could unbalance or damage the impeller. For this reason it is important, when considering a machine, to check out the construction and materials used for this vital component. One good indicator is the length of warranty a manufacturer offers. Some give three years on certain models in their range. Tractor-mounted and pedestrian, engine



powered blowers are also available, these blow the leaves into windrows ready for collections. This then means that large amounts of material is accumulated in one place so some form of loader will be required. This can be in the form of a towed unit or one that fits to the tail board of a trailer, skip or vehicle buck. They are basically a vacuum unit with a large diameter inlet hose and adjustable outlet chute.

PEDESTRIAN MACHINES

Like the tractor-powered machines these come as vacuum collector units or blowers. In most cases the collected material has to pass through the impeller that creates the airflow so, the material it is constructed from is important regarding its longevity. These units can be either push or self-propelled, depending on the make. The main specifications to look out for on the collecting versions, are the size of engine and collecting bag capacity.

HAND HELD BLOWERS AND VACS

There are plenty of these to choose from and the specifications to look for are power-to-weight ratio, the airflow produced and whether a blower can be converted into a collector. If the latter is available, then the material will, in most cases, pass through the impeller, so its construction is paramount to its life expectancy. Bearing in mind that a larger number of these units are designed with the domestic user in mind, it is worth checking out if a manufacturer has commercial versions within their range. When it comes to collecting, a major disadvantage of this type of unit is the capacity bag, this is very often small, so it can be a nuisance and time consuming to have to be continually emptying it.

As most of these types of units are very similar, it is a question of comparing specifications and matching them to value for money.



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Another piece of equipment that is beginning to be seen more is the rotary broom. These engine-powered units have been sold to courses for use in their bunkers and for clearing up heavy debris such as beechnuts. They are now available together with a range of other attachment such as, a long reach hedge cutter, pole prune and brush cutter. All are interchangeable and use only one power source.

AT THE END OF THE DAY

When considering leaf collecting equipment it should be borne in mind that this operation spans only a short period of time, so to get the most out of an investment. A wider application range needs to be considered. Will the machinery perform other tasks throughout year so that the capital outlay is justified? In most cases this will be yes.

SHREDDERS

To speed up the decomposing process leaves could be passed through a shredder. This also has another advantage in that it reduces the volume, so less space is required. This type of machine will also process brushwood and small diameter branches.

There are plenty of commercial and semi-commercial shredders now on the market. The size of unit to go for will depend on the largest amount of vegetation that is likely to be encountered during the year.

When deciding on a suitable model there are a number of points that should be taken into account.





SHREDDING MECHANISMS

On most commercial machines this consists of a drum with either a series of flails or hammers. These need to be kept sharp and balanced, so an important factor to take into consideration is how easy it is to access them to replace any worn or damaged ones.

ENGINES

There is a choice of petrol, diesel or LPG and it is generally a matter of preference which is chosen, however, output is important if the unit is to work efficiently - plenty of power needs to be readily available.

FEEDER CAPACITY

The size of opening for material to enter the shredding chamber must comply with laid down regulations, but this can sometimes make feeding the unit slow, so it is worth looking at a few models to see which one has the best system for your use. Some of the larger machines have an automatic feeder.

TRANSPORTING

While ideally, the shredder is kept in one location, there may be times when it is required by others, so the ease with which it can be transported may be a factor.



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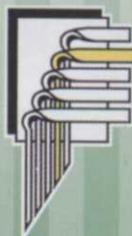


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