

A compact 360 excavator is not the sort of item that will earn its keep on a typical course, but it shows that no mowing or clearance task is beyond mechanical control. The pictured unit provides a safe and effective solution to a problem area, in this case leaving it cleared for tree planting.



Make Life Easier for Yourself

James de Havilland takes the strain of dealing with those difficult to maintain areas around the course

Mowing difficult areas is one of those subjects that most will tend not to worry about, with more pressing tasks in mind. But taking a fresh look at kit to do the job could save time and money.

Difficult to mow areas will, of course, include around trees and shrubs plus banks and physically difficult to access areas. Of growing importance, however, are 'conservation' areas, those parts of a course that are deliberately allowed to revert to their 'natural' state. Although there are those who may suggest these types of area do not need to be maintained, the reality can be rather different.

In many cases, conservation areas need careful management if desirable native plants are to thrive. Leave an area to its own devices, and the bullies of the plant world, such as docks, thistles and bramble, will quickly take over. Henchman that can include couch and other grass thugs, are also keen to strangle out sweet vernal and fescue, the latter tending to thrive in nature where the sward is lightly grazed.

In other words, even conservation areas may need the odd mow, careful planning allowing this to be done typically when desirable plants have had a chance to set seed and invaders, such as docks, are cut down before they have a chance to spread. Spot treatment of new 'weed' growth with herbicide, such as glyphosate, may well be a good idea for the long term protection of the site, but this may not be permissible in all cases.

The trick is finding kit to mow all the difficult areas common on a modern golf course. Putting someone to work with a brushcutter will certainly enable a great deal of awkward mowing to be done, but this task

is neither popular nor productive over a wide area. Two-wheel tractors, to which a range of mowing attachments can be fitted, remain a good choice. Typically offered with a choice of rotary, flail or reciprocating knife cutter bar, these versatile power units can also drive other attachments, further boosting their productivity.

A dedicated power scythe with a heavy duty cutter bar is essentially similar to a two-wheel tractor but developed to typically enable it to operate on steep sidling ground. Changes can include fitting dual wheels to assist lateral traction and a power unit that will not be starved of lubricant when working at an extreme angle.

For most golf courses, a two-wheel tractor and cutter bar combination will have obvious appeal, the power unit having the ability to drive other equipment that can include a cultivator or rotary brush. Cutter bars do have limitations. Ideally suited to longer grass and upright vegetation, cutter bars are less than ideal when it comes to dealing with matted material, uneven ground and heavier vegetation.

An alternative could be a flail mower attachment for the same power unit. Pro-rata, a flail will take more power to drive than a cutter bar, so its working width may be reduced, but it will leave a mulched finish. This can be useful when dealing with large volumes of cut material that includes docks, thistles and other bulky materials.

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A rotary mower attachment is a good compromise between a flail and cutter bar. Simple and easy to maintain, a heavy-duty unit should be able to tackle areas that only receive a periodic mow, including areas that will typically be only cut in late summer. It may be worth looking into the costs of hiring this type of machine. Although modern two-wheel tractor designs are easier to operate than they used to be, some find them hard work.

It is here where a ride-on 'brush cutter' could come into play. Typically featuring hydrostatic drive and a mid-mount rotary deck, these machines have a petrol engine of at least 12hp and a cutting width that will be nudging 1.0m. The deck of these machines is designed to tackle heavy material, hence the term brushcutter, but they will also cope with grass. Of equal importance, they have a low centre of gravity that enables them to work safely across slopes of up to about 30 degrees.

A tractor mounted power arm and flail combination is another versatile option, particularly if the same flail head is used to keep hedges in trim. This type of equipment is not used as widely in golf as it is the amenity sector, the risk of leaks from the hydraulics having long been a concern for some. Modern units, however, are easier to both operate and mount than some earlier designs, with improved hydraulic couplers helping cut the risk of leaks. Small power arms fit compact tractors in the sub-20hp class, with prices starting at around £5,000.

Such is the dominance of ride-on equipment on a modern course, it follows that zero turn, out-front rotary and small mid-mount mowers are far more likely to be at the top of the shopping list for much of this type of work. A large pedestrian clearance mower is still worth considering, these machines having a light footprint and possibly less risk assessment issues when working on banks. It is well worth taking a look at what is on offer. Current models are far more operator friendly than the designs of even a decade ago.



Ride-on brushcutters mix tough mowing ability with ease of operation and high productivity. As a guide, an Etesia Attila is offered in 0.85 and 0.95m versions with hydrostatic drive and chevron pattern tyres. Prices from just under £5,000 to £6,500. Tools like this can be hired for around £100 a day or £400 a week.



Nothing wrong with a brushcutter, but productivity over a large area is compromised and the job can be tedious and tiring, particularly in hot weather. A good harness and gloves will help reduce fatigue and vibration reaching the operator. A complete professional kit will not leave much change out of £450 to £500.



No, a heavy duty 3.0m flail scrub cutter and JCB Fastrac combination will not be at the top of the shopping list for most courses, but kit like this will make short work of areas that need clearing. It can be more cost effective to bring in a contractor to tame a really overgrown area than tackle it in-house.



The Tracmaster Bank Commander is essentially a two-wheel tractor fitted with dual wheels and a 13hp Kohler petrol engine that can work at extreme angles without suffering oil starvation. A choice of attachments is offered, including a 1.35m cutter bar and 0.76m rotary deck. A ready to mow unit will cost from around £3,600.

A large pedestrian clearance mower, such as the hydrostatic John Deere 717E, will offer a relatively wide cut, in this case 1.21m. Add a powerful 17hp power unit and operating rates can be impressive too. At perhaps two thirds the price of a zero turn, units like this are well worth a look.



When manoeuvrability counts, a zero turn delivers. There are now so many makes and models to choose from that it is possible to find an example to fit most needs and budgets. A petrol powered machine may cost a lot less than a diesel, but running costs will be higher. A high capacity diesel unit will carry a sticker price nudging £11,000 or more with collector.



A good compromise between a hand held and ride-on brushcutter is a pedestrian unit. Although the pictured 6hp Etesia Attila 51 looks like a rotary mower, it is fitted with an extra heavy-duty blade and deck to tackle scrub and long grass. Fitted with three forward and one reverse speed, the unit is around £1,600.