



There is no denying that trees can make a huge difference to the look, feel and playability of a course. A good mix of young and mature specimen trees is common on more recently constructed courses. Here it can pay to consider managing the younger trees. Judicious pruning mixed with re-planting and even complete tree removal needs to be thought through. Although it is not easy, try and think how the trees will impact upon the course in 10, 15 and 20 years time.

KEEPING THE BITS YOU DON'T MOW TRIM

By James de Havilland

Managing hedges, trees and non-mown areas is all part and parcel of running a modern course. With increased pressure on labour and budgets, getting this work completed can be a headache. But less so if you think ahead and have the right kit to make maintenance easier.

Trees really do make a massive contribution to the golf environment, but they do bring with them a number of management issues. Leaves and pine needles in autumn, a great thirst for water in dry periods and hazards associated with low, dying or fallen branches. Managing trees may not be at the top of your agenda, but the influence they have ensures they cannot be ignored.

One area that often needs attention is dealing with low or dangerous branches. In most cases these may be fairly easy to get at. If the branch can be sawn off from the ground using a bow saw, then great. The chances are there will be few health and safety issues to worry about. More realistically, lopping off a branch will certainly involve getting up to the branch.

Start mixing a work cocktail that includes height, ropes, chainsaws and ladders and you have the ideal ingredients for a trip to Casualty or worse. Thankfully, modern risk assessment rules these practices out. Some courses will also have trained chainsaw operators who know how to lop branches at height safely. But what about those circumstances where an overhanging branch needs tackling and there is no-one on site with the training to deal with it?

It is here where a pole saw or power pruner can be useful. Used with care, these tools can remove a substantial branch without damaging the tree and, more importantly, with far less risk to the operator than using a chainsaw.

Most chainsaw and brushcutter manufacturers produce what is essentially a brushcutter power unit and pole with a chainsaw head in place of a blade or line trimmer. Indeed a number of manufacturers can supply multipurpose units with hedge trimmer, brushcutter, chainsaw and other attachments.

There are essentially two main types of dedicated pole saw on offer. The first are fixed

length units with a reach to the tip of the saw to just under 3m. The second are telescopic units that may extend to perhaps 4.50 to 5m. The saw element, incidentally, will typically comprise a bar of 10, 12 or possibly 14". Professional backpack engine units, with a hydraulically powered saw, are also offered. These go up to 6m, but are not cheap at around £950 plus.

Telescopic pole saws are likely to be more versatile but also more expensive. A high quality rigid pole saw will be priced from £400, with telescopic units carrying a premium of at least £50 to £100. Reach, incidentally, should not be confused with actual cutting height. For safety, the pruner needs to be operated at 60 degrees to the branch. This is to allow the latter to fall and not land on the operator.

Pole saw two-stroke engines tend to span 20 to 30cc and 0.6 to 1.5kW output. In most cases, a body harness is supplied to help support the weight of the tool when moving it around, but a support harness may also be supplied for use in work. Dedicated pole saws will be supplied with a basic shoulder harness aimed at providing limited



A tractor mounted flail hedge cutter will produce a clean cut on regularly maintained hedges, with the capacity to reduce a hedge to a manageable height even if it has been left uncut for several years. As a rule, the thicker the material a flail has to cut, the less attractive the finish will be. Pictured unit typically used by an agricultural contractor. Great for course boundary hedges.

support. This is fine for occasional use, but it will not be as effective as the more complete harness designs that can be supplied by some manufacturers as an option. These bear the weight of the engine and allow the operator to pivot the saw from the attachment point and onto the branch.

A big advantage of this system is that it spreads the weight of the pruner across both shoulders. When dealing with higher branches, however, the saw will still need to be raised out of the support to provide the necessary reach.

Working a pole saw is straightforward for thin, lighter branches. These can be cut in one action from the top down. Thicker and heavier branches need cutting with care. It is best to cut back towards the trunk progressively in sections to reduce both the weight and volume of material falling. This will help protect the tree and prevent a long branch swinging back and clouting the operator.

For a clean cut at the trunk, larger branches should be undercut by a third before sawing through from the top. The aim is to produce a clean cut that allows the 'wound' to heal quickly and prevent disease entering the tree. As a guide, keep the cut

close to the trunk but retaining enough branch bark at its base to grow over and heal the 'wound'. In practice, getting a clean cut from a pole saw is not easy simply because the saw element is a long way from the operator.

Capacity wise, most pole pruners will tackle a 40cm diameter branch if the saw chain is sharp. Tackling a branch of this size is not necessarily recommended, but it does show engine power is not the key issue but a good sharp chain is the key.

As a rule, it is always better to prune lightly and leave a cleanly cut truncated large branch. In most cases it is best to leave cutting branches right back to the trunk to a trained arboriculturist, particularly on specimen trees.

Extended hedge trimmers

Although it is stating the obvious, the two key elements to a good hedge trimmer are the power unit and the blade. But a vital aspect that turns an effective tool into one that is easy to use and not over tiring is good ergonomics. This assumes

added importance when it comes to using an extended unit; a heavy, poorly designed trimmer will soon fatigue the operator.

Dedicated extended reach hedge trimmers will come with a choice of double or single sided blades and cutting widths of up to about 0.60m or 24 inches. The length of these trimmers will vary, but as a guide 150 to 250cm is typical with retail prices ranging from £400 to £500 for a dedicated unit. A longer blade will weigh more and may not be more productive.

Multi-purpose units

Arguably the best option to look for is a unit that has interchangeable tools; these can include a saw, trimmer, brush and light cultivator, the latter possibly being an ideal tool for fluffing up a bunker. Such units are priced from around £400 and make a versatile choice for a golf club.



FEATURE

The Stihl CombiSystem is available with four different CombiEngines, and the eleven CombiTools. These include a choice of hedge trimmers, a pruner, cultivator and lawn edger, a grass trimmer, brushcutter, scrubcutter, powered sweeper and bristle brush. With the shaft extended using the HT-KM extension, the power pruner Pole Saw makes working on low branches safe and easy.

Powered by a 23.6cc two-stroke engine, the 6.2kg Echo PPT2400 power pruner from Countax has a telescopic shaft that will reach from 2.74m to 3.83m. The 12" cutting unit can reach up a further 1.59m when fitted with an additional extension. Tools like this are great for dealing with hard to reach branches.

Is your course subject to a TPO?

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) are made under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Town and Country Planning (Trees) Regulations 1999. A TPO is made by the local planning authority (usually a local council) to protect specific trees.

Although it is possible to make TPOs on any trees, in practice they are most commonly used in urban and semi-urban settings. A TPO is to protect trees for the public's enjoyment. It is made for the 'amenity' of the tree or woodland, and this can include its nature conservation value but more often means its visual amenity. However, it does mean that if a tree is not visible or accessible from a public place - even slightly - a TPO will not usually be enforced.

TPOs can be placed on any trees including hedgerow trees but not hedges themselves.

There are (presently) four types of TPO, although any one Order can contain any number of items which can be of one or more types.

These types are as follows:

1. Individual: can be applied to an individual tree.
2. Group: can be applied to a group of individual trees which, together, make up a feature of amenity value but which separately might not.
3. Area: a type of TPO not normally made now but still common, as formerly this type was used frequently. It covers all trees in a defined area at the time the order was made.
4. Woodland: covers all trees within a woodland area regardless of how old they are.

TPOs are public documents and can be inspected at the local planning authority's office, or sometimes online. Attached to the TPO are usually a schedule and a map. The schedule shows the type/s of TPO which make up the order, and often gives details of the species of trees affected. A map gives the location of the TPO and shows individual trees or areas as appropriate. How a TPO map and the Order itself are interpreted can be a bit tricky. If in doubt, it really pays to seek advice.

A TPO can date back to 1949, so you may not be aware that tree in your care are protected. This will be less likely on any course that has been sold within recent years but if in doubt it can pay to check. TPO legislation has altered in recent years and continues to be reviewed.

Are trees within a Conversation Area automatically covered by a TPO?

Conservation Areas are designated by local authorities for building and landscape conservation. The definition does not cover nature conservation or trees in the broadest sense. To work on trees within a Conservation Area, however, it is necessary to give notice in writing to the local authority six weeks before undertaking any work. Some local authorities may place a TPO upon a tree subsequent to an application having been made to remove or work on the tree.