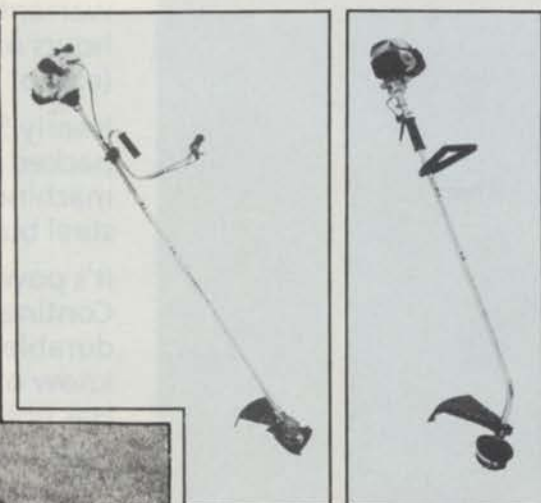


Trimmer makers see trend toward gas, blades over line

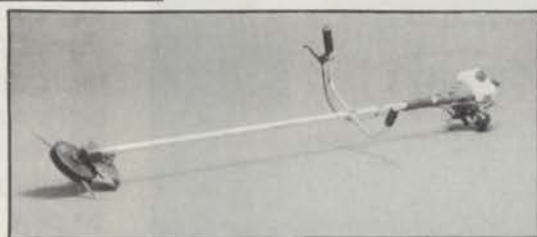
by Bruce F. Shank, executive editor, and Kevin Cooney, assistant editor



One-wheel design and Briggs and Stratton engine, shown above, make the Byho edger rugged and fast. At right, rotocut blade on Stihl FS 65 can replace nylon line for tough weeds.



Handlebar and 40 cc engine give commercial strength to Echo's 400 AE, above left. Hoffco's GT160T is popular with homeowners trading up to commercial type trimmers.



Strictly a professional tool in the beginning, the power trimmer drifted away from the professional to the consumer market with the use of nylon line. Today, trimmer manufacturers are re-focusing on the needs of the professional landscape manager.

Those needs appear to be long-lasting, smoother running engines and blades instead of nylon line, according to manufacturers interviewed by Weeds Trees & Turf in March.

Despite the increased professional use of chemical trim with products such as Roundup, manufacturers report trimmer sales have grown. "Our sales to the professional market were strong during the recession," says Clampco's Stephen Nathan. "Landscape contractors tend to deal with middle to upper income homeowners and commercial accounts that are less affected by recession. We've also seen increased capital spending by golf course superintendents."

"The total market increased nearly 25 percent last year," says Rich McGuire of Stihl. "The market isn't anywhere near saturated yet. People are trading up and using the trimmers for more jobs. The lawn edger on wheels is almost a thing of the past."

The typical homeowner does not use chemical trim products, depending mainly on electric, and increasingly, gasoline-powered trimmers. Carol Smith of Hoffco claims professional chemical trim has not made a dent in their business. "Maybe a certain percentage of the market will go to chemical trim, but we don't think it is going to hurt us. We spend a lot of time in development and research, always trying a different carburetor, clutch design, or our patented flexible shaft."

"The basic concept is not going to change," says Echo's Tom Boscher. "You're always going to have a device to turn a head, whether it is a nylon monofilament line or saw blade for brush cutters."

"Contract landscapers tried out the string trimmers, and I think they found they are not as durable as a blade trimmer or edger," Nathan points out. Golf course superintendents have tried chemical trim and growth regulators more than Clampco's other customers.

Weedeater's Phil Hayes says gasoline trimmers are the fastest growing area of his company's business. "We've got a couple of innovations this year, including removable heads and fuel injection starting," Hayes says. "We

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are beginning to see a switch as repeat buyers trade up from electrics to bigger electric and gasoline models."

Service a potential problem

Since trimmers are a low-dollar, low priority item for some equipment distributors, manufacturers must work closer with dis-

tributors. "A trimmer with a \$300 price tag can get lost in a distributor's catalog," says Nathan. "We have to be highly selective about distributors because so many of the big-name distributors concentrate on big-name, high-dollar products."

Retail outlets may operate under the assumption you are a homeowner and speed of repair is not crucial. Smaller, commercial suppliers may be the best choice for service.

Attachments increase

The original powered trimmers had fixed heads, either leather or nylon lines and brush cutting blades. Today, heads are interchangeable and include small cultivators, blowers, edger blades, and even snow shovels.

HMC Green Machine introduced an attachment series with a single power unit this spring. "I think once our competitors find out what we're doing and how well this product works, they'll jump on the band wagon as well," says Katherine Takis of HMC.

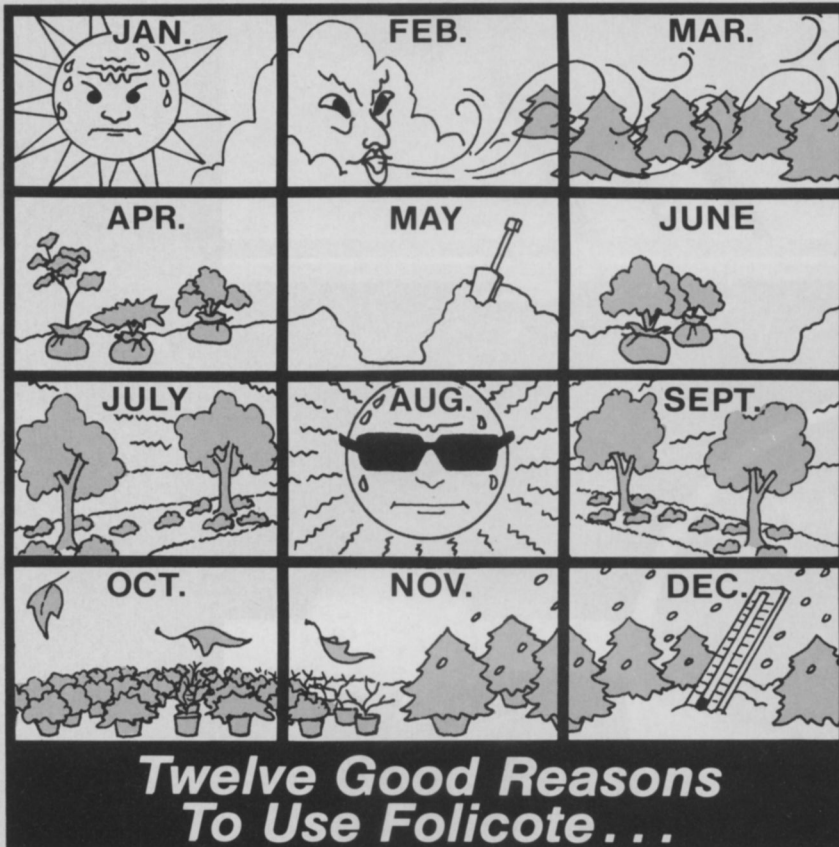
Small, commercial suppliers may be the best choice for trimmer purchase and service.

"Historically, power equipment companies have never had a great deal of success with multi-purpose tools," claims Stihl's McGuire. "A few companies are coming out with attachments like little cultivators and snowblowers, but we think the jury is still out for acceptance on these attachments." Stihl was the first to introduce a free-swinging plastic blade head that permits cutting of tough weeds without severe damage to trees or other objects.

Engines now have solid state ignition, improved air filtration, fuel injection starting, improved carburetors, larger fuel tanks, and better balance for the operator. Gasoline trimmers weigh from 12 to 20 lbs. with engines ranging from 21cc to 85cc.

Versatility and longer engine life increase the efficiency of the trimmer as a professional landscape maintenance tool. Like trim mowers, you don't expect them to last forever when using them eight hours each day, six days each week. They have a role to play in the market so you build replacement cost into your charges. Chemicals can't eliminate the need for mechanical trimmers. The key is to combine all tools to achieve the greatest efficiency.

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