

Before buying string trimmers, consider these different features

■ Since their inception less than two decades ago, string trimmers have become a labor-saving device and a staple in the professional landscape manager's equipment arsenal.

They can be used for trimming grass around walks, buildings and plantings; for areas too steep or rocky for a mower; or for attacking high weeds. Some models can be converted to edgers, cultivators, blowers, vacuums and even snowthrowers.

With so many different sizes and shapes on the market now, the conscientious prospective buyer should consider numerous factors before making a purchase.



The Maruyama BC320H: 12.5 lbs., with four- and eight-tooth blades.

Professional models (as opposed to consumer models) generally use gasoline engines. However, if you're going to be using them for extremely lightweight trimming, you might investigate the electric and battery-pack models, which are somewhat less expensive (but also less powerful).

Some other considerations:

1) Curved or straight shaft? Though the curved shafts are generally easier to use, straight shafts generally offer fewer maintenance problems with the driveshaft and are a bit safer, since the cutting head is farther from the operator.

Curved shaft trimmers use a flexible driveshaft to carry the engine's power to the head while straight shafts use a rigid drive that is generally more power-efficient.

2) Rotary or reciprocating head? Rotary heads, which usually incorporate either one or two nylon filament lines, make complete 360-degree revolutions. Reciprocating heads, on the other hand, move back and forth in the two- to three-inch range.

Though rotary heads are more versatile, reciprocating heads maintain a clean cut but are safer to use because flying debris is minimized. Reciprocating heads can also get quite close to obstacles without doing damage.

Curved shaft string trimmers—like Husqvarna's 26RLC—are said to be easier to use, but less power efficient.



3) Balance and maneuverability? On some models, the engine is placed at the back end of the unit; on others, it is down at the head. In either case, balance is the key to efficient user operation.

The best way to determine whether the unit meets your needs is to actually visit a dealer and get "the feel" of the instrument.

Remember, too, when you're testing the unit that considerably more physical stress is placed on the user who has to trim for hours on end.

4) Engine vibration? Some models feature anti-vibration systems that include rubber mounts to block engine vibrations from the handles. This should be one of your prime considerations, if you're going to have people working long hours with the tools.

5) Engine power? Cubic centimeter engine displacement and horsepower should be considered. If the instrument is to be used for light weed trimming around home and office landscapes, you'll not need as powerful a unit. If, however, the

The Homelite HBC-30: 13 lbs., with tri-arc blades.

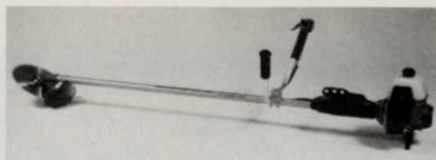
operator will be trimming tall, heavy weeds, you'll want more power.

6) String advance? Most manufacturers make manual feeds, bump-feed heads and automatic heads. On the manual feed models, the unit must be turned off to feed string out. Bump-feed heads feature an under-carriage button that feeds string out by bumping it on the ground. (Be careful: according to consumer reports, some units need just a light tap, others a much firmer bump. Test and buy the unit that meets your needs.)

7) Options? Most units will come with options and interchangeable parts that include safety equipment (like goggles), different style handles, shoulder harnesses and cutting edges (saw blades, machete blades and tri-arc blades are those listed in the accompanying chart). Check with your dealer.

—Jerry Roche

Robin's NB-411 weighs 16 lbs., has a quick-release harness.



STRING TRIMMERS FOR THE GREEN INDUSTRY

MANUFACTURER	MODEL	ENGINE	TRIM PATH	WEIGHT	SHAFT	ACCESSORIES	CIRCLE NO.
John Deere	21C	21.2 cc	16"	10.3 lbs.	curved	additional heads, blades	301
	21S	21.2 cc	17"	11.2 lbs.	straight	heads, blades, handlebar	
	25S	24.4 cc	17"	12.5 lbs.	straight	heads, blades, handlebar	
	30S	30.8 cc	17"	15.0 lbs.	straight	heads, blades, handlebar	
	38B	37.4 cc	15"	18.2 lbs.	straight	adjustable handlebars, additional heads, blades	
Echo	GT-1100	21.2 cc	16"	9.4 lbs.	curved		302
	GT-2400	23.6 cc	16"	10.3 lbs.	curved		
	SRM-1501	21.2 cc	17"	11.1 lbs.	straight		
	SRM-2400	23.6 cc	17"	12.1 lbs.	straight		
	SRM-2410	23.6 cc	17"	12.5 lbs.	straight	u-handle standard	
	SRM-2501	24.4 cc	17"	13.3 lbs.	straight		
	SRM-2510	24.4 cc	17"	13.7 lbs.	straight	u-handle standard	
	SRM-3000	30.8 cc	17"	15.8 lbs.	straight	right-hand grip design	
Hoffco	WW88	85 cc	18"	38 lbs.	curved		303
	JP890A	30.5 cc	16"	21 lbs.	straight	handlebar kit	
	JP800B	26.5 cc	16"	21 lbs.	straight	handlebar kit	
Homelite	HBC-40	40 cc	20"	18 lbs.	straight	harness, tri-arc, machete, saw blade	304
	HBC-38	40 cc	18"	16 lbs.	straight	harness, tri-arc, machete blades	
	HBC-30	30 cc	18"	13 lbs.	straight	strap; saw, machete, tri-arc blades	
	HBC-18	30 cc	18"	13.5 lbs.	curved	tri-arc, machete, saw blades	
	ST-385BC	25 cc	17"	13 lbs.	straight	saw blade	
Husqvarna	26RLC	26 cc	16"	11.8 lbs.	curved		305
Landscape's Supply	18CC	18.4 cc	n/a	10 lbs.	flexible		306
	24.1CC	24.1 cc	n/a	13 lbs.	straight		
	33CC	33.3 cc	n/a	18 lbs.	straight	10-inch 80-point blade, bullhorn handle	
Lesco	LST2100	21.2 cc	17"	11.1 lbs.	straight		307
		23.6 cc	16"	12 lbs.	straight		
Maruyama	BC200C	19.8 cc	16"	9.7 lbs.	curved	manual head	308
	BC200	19.8 cc	17"	10.6 lbs.	straight	4-, 8-tooth blades	
	BC260	25.4 cc	17"	11.2 lbs.	straight	4-, 8-tooth blades	
	BC260H	25.4 cc	17"	12.1 lbs.	straight	4-, 8-tooth blades	
	BC260C	25.4 cc	17"	9.7 lbs.	curved	manual head	
	BC320	31.8 cc	17"	11.7 lbs.	straight	4-, 8-tooth blades	
	BC320H	31.8 cc	17"	12.5 lbs.	straight	4-, 8-tooth blades, manual head	
	BC402M	40.2 cc	17"	17.9 lbs.	straight	saw blade, full auto head, 4-, 8-tooth blade	
BC480M	48.0 cc	17"	17.9 lbs.	straight	saw blade, full auto head, 8-tooth blade		
RedMax	BT17	17.2 cc	n/a	9.5 lbs.	curved		309
	BT220	22.5 cc	n/a	8.8 lbs.	curved		
	BC220DL	22.5 cc	n/a	10.2 lbs.	straight		
	BC260DL	25.4 cc	n/a	13.3 lbs.	straight		
	BC340DL	33.6 cc	n/a	15.3 lbs.	straight		
	BC440DWM	41.5 cc	n/a	18.5 lbs.	straight		
	SGC220DL	22.5 cc	n/a	14.1 lbs.	straight	reciprocating head	
Robin	NBF171	16 cc	12"	9.6 lbs.	flexible		310
	NB211C	20.3 cc	15"	8.9 lbs.	straight	quick-release shoulder strap	
	NB231C	22.2 cc	16"	9.3 lbs.	straight		
	NB26	25.6 cc	16"	12.2 lbs.	straight	saw blade, handlebars, harness	
	NB351	34.4 cc	18"	15.9 lbs.	straight	saw blade, quick-release harness	
	NB411	40.2 cc	18"	16 lbs.	straight	saw blade, quick-release harness	
	NB50L	51.7 cc	18"	19 lbs.	straight	saw blade, quick-release harness	
Stihl	FS74	23.8 cc	n/a	12.0 lbs.	flexible	shoulder harness, goggles, 8 heads	311
	FS76	23.8 cc	n/a	11.7 lbs.	straight	shoulder harness, goggles, 11 heads	
	FS86AVE	25.4 cc	n/a	15.0 lbs.	straight	shoulder harness, goggles, 8 heads	
	FR106	34.4 cc	n/a	23.8 lbs.	str/flex	goggles, 9 heads	
	FS180	35.2 cc	n/a	15.7 lbs.	straight	shoulder harness, goggles, 6 heads	
WeedEater	XT20T	22 cc	15"	10.9 lbs.	curved		312
	XT50	30 cc	17"	11.8 lbs.	curved		
	XT85	30 cc	18"	14.8 lbs.	curved		
	XT100/125	30 cc	18"	13.4 lbs.	straight		
	GT1 15T	22 cc	15"	10.7 lbs.	curved		
	GT1 16	30 cc	17"	10.9 lbs.	curved		
	GT1 18	30 cc	18"	13 lbs.	curved		

Source: LM mail survey, Dec. 1991/Jan. 1992