



A John Deere debris bucket makes quick work of cleaning up the heavier stuff winter left in the landscape.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

Spring cleaning begins when the snow melts. It's amazing the variety of dreck contractors find when the weather warms. But an array of tools makes the job easier and more efficient.

BY DANIEL G. JACOBS MANAGING EDITOR

JEFF HILE HAS picked up leaves, pinecones, soda cans, beer bottles, cigarettes, paper, plastic and small rodents.

OK, the inventor of the LawnShark doesn't claim to, advise (or advertise) picking up small rodents, but in talking to him one gets the feeling that if a creature didn't beat a hasty retreat, it would meet a gruesome fate when the debris-clearing device passed overhead.

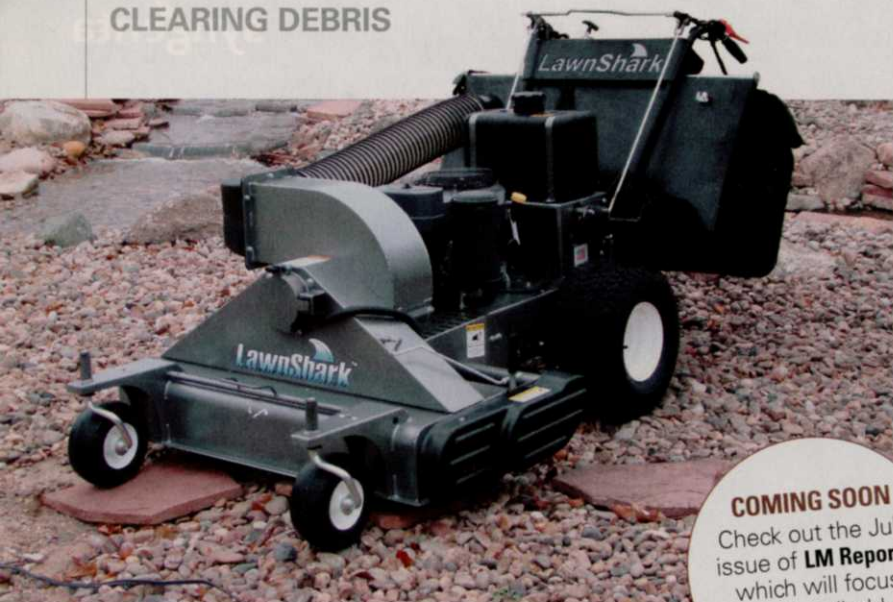
"It has gone in so many different direc-

tions in what people really want to pick up with it," says Hile, director of sales for Lawn-Shark USA. "There are some people who want to pick up chicken manure and straw. You can thatch your lawn with it."

Debris management covers a wide range of activities, from spring cleaning and leaf pickup in the fall to clearing trees and branches from construction sites. And while there are scores of things to clear away,

continued on page 70

CLEARING DEBRIS



COMING SOON
Check out the July issue of **LM Reports**, which will focus on handheld equipment.



The LawnShark (top) can thatch lawns, pick up leaves and clear debris from parking lots.

The Toro Co. offers a number of handheld blowers, but also manufactures tow-behind units, like the Pro Force blower pictured here.

continued from page 68
there seems to be nearly as many machines and attachments to do the job.

Handheld equipment

Blowers and vacuums are the stalwarts of the handheld debris management category. A variety of companies offer handheld and backpack blowers and vacuums.

Shindaiwa recently introduced two new gas powered blowers, a two-cycle model (EB802) and a hybrid two-cycle/four-cycle model (EB8520). Both come with a newly engineered backpack that increases operator comfort and efficiency, says Paul Wheatcraft, director of marketing for Shindaiwa, which recently became a division of Japan-based Yamabiko Corp.

Shindaiwa engineers teamed with a university to do a study exploring how users wear

the backpacks to figure out where the pressure points are on the body. The result was an ergonomic, easy-to-use system, Wheatcraft says.

“Our new model is actually a little heavier than the previous one,” he notes. “Put on the previous one and then put on the (new model). You swear it weighs less because of the way it distributes the weight.”

There is a quiet mode switch on both units that is set to limit the throttle, keeping the decibel level below 65 dB.

“If you’re out in the open where noise is not an issue, you can (use) maximum power,” Wheatcraft explains. “But if you’re operating in an area where you need to restrict (noise), just flip the switch. You don’t have to have your ‘quiet’ blower and your ‘powerful’ blower — you just have the one machine.”

Power to the pros

The Toro Co. offers four models of corded electric blowers and blower/vacuum/mulchers.

“On the cordless end, nobody’s really been able to solve the problem of weight versus power on a blower,” notes Matt Medden, Toro’s marketing manager for handheld equipment. “Blowers typically require a decent amount of power to move air. It takes a lot of power to move those fans.”

Toro claims to have the most powerful blower available, but it depends on what you’re measuring.

“The market has tended — at least in the last five or six years — to compete on miles per hour, but it’s the combination of miles per hour and airflow that really matters,” Medden says. “We claim, on the upper end of our products, that we have the most powerful blower, gas or electric.”

Another blower may offer more air speed, Medden says, but they can’t produce the same “air horsepower,” to use Toro’s term.

And because they’re electric, Toro’s models tend to be less expensive and quieter than their gas-powered counterparts, he says.

Bigger debris

The LawnShark, like its elder competitor the Billy Goat, can be used on a variety of surfaces and in far more ways than simply leaf pickup. Hile recalls responding to a contractor who

continued on page 72

CLEARING DEBRIS

Skid steers from Bobcat and other companies offer many debris-clearing possibilities — thanks to the many attachments that are available.



continued from page 70

commented the machine wasn't worth it because it could only be used a couple of months during the year.

Hile countered that he could start early in the spring to dethatch lawns, work into the summer picking up parking lot contracts and then in fall picking up leaves. "You're going from April to November," he says. "You can use that machine nine months out of the year, which is much more than you can use your lawn mower."

For those without dedicated debris management equipment, there are a number of attachments for tractors, skid steers, loaders and compact utility equip-

ment that can do just about any job.

"We have some 80 different attachments for our skid steer and our compact track loaders that make the machines able to go from one task to another," says Bryan Zent, marketing manager for Bobcat Co.

For branches and small trees, contractors can use grapples and other types of buckets. They can then deposit them into a wood chipper for disposal.

"We have angle brooms, different types of brushes and a water kit that can be attached so you can prevent dust being created as you sweep things up, which is important in some jurisdictions where they're sensitive about air quality

issues," Zent says.

John Deere also offers a number of attachments to make the cleanup process more efficient. And like Bobcat, the tools can be swapped among machines quickly and easily. A four-in-one bucket and grapples can be used to easily move large debris from a site. The attachments fit on a variety of John Deere machines.

"Contractors who have skid steers and compact utility tractors can go back and forth between these buckets," says Laura Alvrado, a product manager with John Deere.

Deere also recently updated its material collection system, which now has a better flow system for more efficient pickup of grass and leaves. The material collection system attaches to the company's mid-mount mowers.

Both Deere and Bobcat offer attachable brooms for quick sweeping of sites. Users can clean sidewalks of debris — or even snow in the winter.

In other words, the season doesn't matter. Whether you're picking up leaves in the fall, moving snow in winter or gathering branches, bushes and small trees for construction work in the spring and summer, there is a tool for every task. **LM**



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