

# Use power weed trimmers properly for safety

NEWARK, Del. — Flexible line or string power trimmers now make it possible to cut weeds and grasses growing in places hard to reach with a mower. They make quick work of trimming vegetation around fence posts and buildings without damaging the structures. But for their own safety, users must understand how these machines operate and use them properly, says University of Delaware extension agriculture engineer Tom Williams.

These devices use monofilament nylon string or strings rotating at high speed to cut or strike off grass and soft vegetation in a 6- to 18-inch swath. Heavy-duty weed and brushcutters have a steel cutting blade instead of string.

Williams says line trimmers were developed in Texas in 1974 and are now manufactured by several outdoor power equipment companies. The machines are powered by small electric motors or two-cycle gasoline engines and vary in price from under \$20 to over \$400. The least expensive models have fractional horsepower electric motors and smaller diameter monofilament lines and are only suitable for grass trimming. Some models have rechargeable batteries, a feature which allows more freedom than a power cord. Heavy-duty electric models can be used for cutting and pruning.

Gasoline-powered trimmers and cutters aren't limited by power cords, but they are noisy, the engineer says. Their engines vary in size from about 15 cc for light-weight models to over 80 cc for heavy-duty professional brush-

cutters. The larger the engine, the heavier the machine. Any machine over 12 pounds should be used with a shoulder harness, Williams says. For better control, heavy-duty brushcutters have handlebars and body harnesses.

Light-duty trimmers have flexible driveshafts from the engine to the cutting head; heavy-duty brushcutters use straight solid driveshafts for longer life.

"The size machine to buy depends on the size of your property and the amount of trimming and brushcutting to be done," says the specialist. "If you have a lot of land to clear and prune, choose a heavy-duty gasoline-powered model with a straight driveshaft, body harness, good balance and anti-vibration mountings. If you're just going to trim grass around your driveway and patio, an electric model will do."

Heavy-duty trimmers have thicker monofilament line than the lighter models so that they can cut heavier vegetation. The thicker line will also last longer. "Trimming around concrete walks and metal fence posts will soon wear out the line, so save these jobs for last," he advises. "Many models have a semi-automatic line feed to renew worn line, which is a convenient feature. When you need more, on some you just tap the head on the ground and the line is automatically cut to the right length. Use only the replacement line recommended by the manufacturer. Never use wire instead."

Before operating any of these trimmers or cutters, Williams

advises owners to read the operator's manual. This will tell how to use the machine most effectively and safely.

Always wear sturdy leather shoes, long pants, long-sleeved shirt, safety goggles, gloves and hat when operating a trimmer as it will throw dirt and debris. If you own a gasoline model, be sure to wear ear protection (inserts or muffs), the specialist says. When using a steel-bladed model for brushcutting and pruning, wear steel-toed safety boots and a hard hat. Always adjust the handles and straps to fit your body size so you can operate the machine comfortably. It's best not to run it for more than an hour without taking a break because of the vibration.

Don't operate the machine without the guards in place, and work from right to left so that the debris is thrown away from you. Make sure there are no bystanders in the area. Take care when trimming around young trees; if the line hits them it will damage their bark.

Before operating a weed trimmer or brushcutter, always check it for loose parts caused by vibration. Never make adjustments with the motor running and never refuel a hot engine. Inspect steel cutting blades for cracks, dullness and looseness. When sharpening blades, be aware that dipping a hot blade in water will make it brittle and more likely to break. Always use the replacement blades recommended by the manufacturer.

Since trimming is usually a dusty job, Williams recommends cleaning the air filter daily on a

gasoline model. Use the proper oil-fuel mixture because this is the source of lubrication for a two-cycle engine. Remove all gasoline before long-term storage to prevent gums from fouling the

carburetor.

When used properly and safely, powered trimmers and brushcutters can make quick work of cutting unwanted vegetation.

## Technical improvements increase carpet performance

NEWARK, Del. — Choosing a new carpet was never easy, but now it's more puzzling than ever. There's a whole new vocabulary to learn.

The biggest news in the carpet industry is "fourth generation nylon and polyester." What does "generation" mean in this context, and how does the fourth generation differ from the first, second, and third?

In carpets, as in computers, a new generation is established each time a technological advance results in a significant improvement in performance, says Delaware extension home economist Pat Wilson. In the first generation, light-reflecting agents were added to carpet fibers. By reducing the transparency of the nylon filament, these agents helped hide dirt.

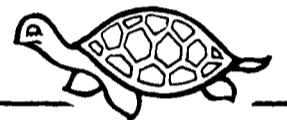
In the second generation, the fiber's cross-sectional structure was redesigned to reflect more light. This improved the carpet's ability to make surface accumulation of dirt.

In the third generation, antistatic properties were added. The resulting reduction of static electricity made carpets from nylon yarns more livable. Wilson says the fourth generation in fiber technology makes it possible for yarn producers to apply a soil-protection fluorochemical finish as the fibers are being formed. This allows the finish to be integrated uniformly throughout the structure of the yarn for better performance.

Scientists have also developed antimicrobial agents for carpet fibers. These reduce the growth and multiplication of fungi and bacteria. If odor-causing organisms found in food and other organic substances cannot multiply, they die within hours. Preventing the growth of new odor-causing bacteria keeps carpet fresh.

Don't let the new terms confuse you, Wilson says. Think about the properties you need in a carpet, and take advantage of the technological advances that will help you get the most from your investment.

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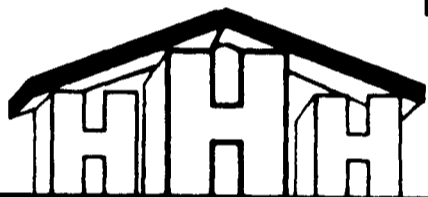
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