



EQUIPMENT

CHIPPER SHREDDER REVIEW

By H. E. Gibson



Consider your needs when buying a chipper/shredder. Gardeners with small suburban lots should consider a machine with less horsepower, while gardeners with larger wooded areas will be more satisfied with greater horsepower.

AFTER TRIMMING SEVERAL OVER-grown shrubs, it's very satisfying to step back and admire their newly tamed look. Your sense of satisfaction melts quickly, however, when you turn and see a pile of trimmings nearly as tall as your head. Hours of cutting and bundling lie ahead — an activity not nearly as satisfying as shaping a row of shrubs.

Don't toss up your pruning shears or hedge trimmer in frustration yet. There's a new breed of chipper/shredder on the market that will help you see the pile of limbs as next spring's mulch or compost instead of this fall's headache.

The chippers of old were bulky machines with large, gas-powered engines, which made quick work of fallen tree limbs on the "back 40." About 20 years ago, combination chipper/shredders appeared on the market. Since that time there have been additional improvements in small and mid-sized chipper/shredders, making them practical and affordable tools.

When you get right down to it, getting rid of garden debris in any form is like giving away black gold, namely compost. Organic gardeners have known the advantage of compost for years. If you thought composting took years of decomposition time and hours of work, a chipper/shredder could change your mind. Chopping the organic matter into smaller pieces increases the surface area of leaves, vines, stalks and limbs which, in turn,

speeds the decomposition process considerably.

Once you've decided to recycle this fall's limbs, leaves and garden leftovers, the next step is choosing the best machine for the job. Just as you shouldn't buy a spirited thoroughbred if you want a gentle riding pony, don't purchase an 18-hp chipper to handle debris from a small backyard. There is a difference between chipping and shredding, but many manufacturers make machines that will do both.

Shredders grind and slice leaves, vines, brush, stalks and other litter into

yds/hr). Therefore, a machine with a capability of 9.5 can handle 9.5 cubic yards of leaves, stalks and debris in an hour, if fed continuously.

Chippers use the same concept as shredders, except that mounted blades circulate to chip off limbs and branches as you feed them through the machine, much the same way as the slicing attachment on a food processor.

Just like shredders, chippers are powered by gasoline engines or electric motors. The capacity of a chipper is measured by how large a branch it can handle. Smaller models will typically handle up to 1½-inch limbs. Larger 5- to 8-hp models can tackle up to 3-inch-diameter branches. The biggest machines, which have 18- to 20-hp engines, can chip limbs of almost any size.

Because of the different blades required, combination chipper/shredders generally have different intake chutes for the separate functions. The common denominator in all types of chippers and shredders is the engine or motor. In all cases, the size of the engine or motor determines what the machine can handle and what it can't. If you feed in a piece of wood the engine can't handle, it will stall.

Electric models usually operate on 110v current, so any outdoor outlet will do as long as it is close at hand. An extension cord can be used, but be advised that long extension cords diminish the power delivered to the

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tiny pieces. Whatever you put into the hopper at the top slides down a chute until it hits a rotating drum that has either hammers or flails attached to it. The hammers or flails mash the debris until the particles are small enough to fall through the discharge screen and out the discharge chute. Larger models have more hammers or flails. Shredders are powered by either electric motors or gasoline engines. Typically, shredder efficiency is measured in the number of cubic yards of debris the shredder can shred per hour (cu.

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