

Wood chipper tips

By Jan Soult Walker

One sure way to make quick work of tree and shrub trimmings is to reduce them to mulch using a wood chipper. Here's what you should know to make the best choice for your needs.

Trees and shrubs are part of your property's inherent beauty, but they also demand upkeep with seasonal trimming and storm cleanup. Finding ways to dispose of limbs and logs can be a challenge. Open burning often isn't allowed due to pollution concerns. You can pay haulers and refuse companies to cart away large bundles of wood, but that can be cost prohibitive over the long term.

Instead, many acreage owners are investing in a wood chipper, sized for residential use and designed to grind large amounts of wood into manageable and useful mounds of mulch – a cost-efficient alternative with immediate benefits. Mulch can be spread in gardens and around trees and shrubs to hold in moisture, inhibit weed growth, and add organic-rich nutrients to the soil. Wood chips lend a neatly landscaped look to the yard.

Size it up

As you shop for a wood chipper to suit your property and budget, you will find a wide selection. Before you buy, evaluate your acreage, taking into consideration the number of trees and shrubs you have. Then, compare these basic requirements against the features of a residential model to help you find the best value.

Wood chippers designed for residential use vary in what size branch they can grind. If you own a wood-burning fireplace or want to sell firewood to neighbors, then you likely don't have a need to recycle larger logs. In that case, you'll need to anticipate the maximum size of branch you want the chipper to handle. You'll find the range begins



with smaller models that handle branches up to 2½ inches in diameter all the way up to hefty units that grind branches almost 4 inches in diameter. Generally, the larger the model, the more you will pay.

Also, keep in mind that you need a place to store the chipper. Some models can be quite compact, taking up less space than a push mower and fitting into an area about 2 feet square. Even so, these compact models often handle branches up to about 3 inches in diameter.

The right stuff

Consider these factors as you evaluate wood chippers:

- Look for models that are fabricated of heavy-gauge steel and equipped with hardened-steel cutting blades – characteristics that provide enough muscle to do the job well for years.
- A large hopper lets you quickly feed the chipper bulky branches or bushels of leaves.
- Large wheels make it easier to maneuver a chipper over rough ground.

According to the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, the bigger the job, the more horsepower you will want to buy. Gas models vary from 1.5 hp. to over 16 hp. (It is