

PURCHASING HEDGE TRIMMERS – GAS OR ELECTRIC?

Contents and photography courtesy of Little Wonder

It's not easy these days to choose a commercial hedge trimmer. For commercial strength and endurance the choices are many in gas hedge trimmers and few in electric hedge trimmers. What do you need for your business? Whether you are a small commercial landscaper just starting out or a seasoned veteran running a chain of landscaping companies, you will find that you need both gas and electric and for good reason. Gas hedge trimmers provide mobility and production; electric hedge trimmers allow you to manage noise as necessary, to start the productive day earlier, or to maintain shrubbery in noise-sensitive locations. Maybe you haven't had to purchase a hedge trimmer lately and you don't know that the rules have changed. Regulations on emissions and noise are getting more and more stringent for outdoor power equipment.

For the professional, the hedge trimmer is an all day long heavy usage product, and it needs to run and cut as good today as the day you bought it. After all, the price for a quality commercial grade hedge trimmer can be steep. Pricing starts at about \$200.00 for a Single Edge Electric Hedge Trimmer to about \$450.00 or more for a Double Edge Gas Hedge Trimmer. Depending on the size of the work crew, and the tenacity of the jobs, hedge trimmers can become very expensive indeed – which is where quality and warranty come in.

Factoring Your Needs

Where you work is one factor. If you work anywhere in the state of California – electric is not only the most cost effective way to go, but soon may be the only legal way to go. California has the most stringent emissions regulations in the US, if not in all of North America. Canada is not far behind. Know your state, county, and municipal regulations.

When you work is a second factor. Noise comes with any two-cycle engine product, less in 4-cycle but not less enough. Although Canada and California have both recently waved a 'more severe' noise pollution bill on outdoor power equipment, regulations of some sort are sure to follow. When California passes or even considers any "quality of life" bill many states take notice. Texas for instance, has recently passed an anti-noise pollution law that prohibits the use of certain outdoor power equipment before 7 a.m. and after 8 p.m. State regulations and your clients personal preference will tell you how much of a factor noise levels are.

What you work on is the third factor. Are you trimming residential bushes or are you conquering the mazes at Windsor Castle? Are you trimming new growth regularly or do you face old thick growth more often. Growth capacity matters greatly when deciding which hedge trimmer to use. While your choice in hedge trimmers is not decided solely by commercial or residential landscaping, it does factor into the decision process. Commercial Landscaping is more demanding on your equipment with extended run time, frequent equipment maintenance, refueling, etc. Residential landscaping is less time consuming per job. It may only take you 10-15 minutes to trim the hedges at a residence compared to 45-60 minutes for a commercial property.

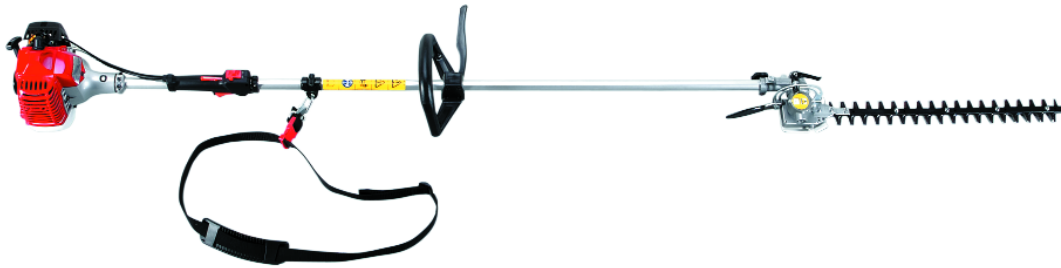
The Pros in General - Gas

Power, speed, and mobility are the true benefits of the Gas Hedge Trimmer. Gas hedge trimmers can handle thicker growth, generally cut up to one-inch capacity, which would make it the better choice to tackle thick growth. Gas hedge trimmers are available in single and double edge models as well as extended reach models. Many professionals like single edge models as they get the most production for the weight of the unit. A 30" single edge unit weighs less than a 30" double edge unit. Double edge units are more comfortable for both right and left handed operators as a single edge unit may be slightly more comfortable for a right handed operator. Gas hedge trimmers are available in bar lengths from 18 inches to 42 inches. Be sure to check the actual cutting capacity of a hedge trimmer to insure it will meet your production needs. Some manufacturers measure their cutting length from the center of the transmission to the tip of the blade



bar. This can be misleading as this distance does not usually reflect the true cutting capacity, which should be measured from the inside of the first cutting tooth on the blade to the inside of the last cutting tooth (unrestricted by blade guards). There are units on the market touted as a 24” cut which yield only 18” – measure the distance between the first and last tooth. This can make a big difference in your cutting time.

Gas hedge trimmers also offer “extended reach” units. Look for units with a cutter head that will allow you to position the blades anywhere in a 180 degree arc. This will allow you to do ground cover as well as high growth. Also look for an extended reach long shaft that can be converted to a short shaft. This will give you much more versatility for your unit and a better value.



The Pros in General – Electric

The Electric Hedge Trimmer has its place in the industry. If you are not using one now, go and rent one. Rental houses only rent commercial grade electric hedge trimmers. You will be surprised at the productivity of the electric hedge trimmer and how (due to their quiet operation), you can work effectively in noise sensitive areas. They are very light and easy to use and you can cut 200 feet from an electrical outlet if you use 14 gauge or heavier electric cord. Certain commercial accounts such as hospitals, schools, restaurants, municipalities, nursing homes and even the clubhouse at the golf course insist on the quiet of electric hedge trimmers. You can start your day with the rooster’s serenade if you desire. Electric hedge trimmers are a very good value. They also offer a great deal of savings in several areas: initial price,

less down time, less engine maintenance, lower operating costs and durability. It is not uncommon for commercial grade electric hedge trimmers to last 5 to 10 years and even longer! Be sure to seek out an electric hedge trimmer that is powered by a D.C. motor (A.C. current converted to D.C.) as this will stop the blades much faster than an A.C. motor when the hand switches are released. This makes the unit much safer to operate. The electric hedge trimmer is much

lighter, some up to half the weight of many commercial gas hedge trimmers. The blade speed on most electric hedge trimmers is equivalent to that of the single edge gas hedge trimmer (averaging about 2,400 cuts per minute) with less vibration than gas hedge trimmers. Electric Hedge Trimmers average a cutting capacity of about a half-inch, making it a reasonable choice for newer growth.



The Dealer Relationship

Equipment has to be setup correctly before use and maintained during and after. A quality commercial hedge trimmer can last a long time (if regulations allow) but only if maintained properly. This is where dealer support is crucial. With all of the improvements to hedge trimmers over the past few years maintenance requirements are constantly changing and your dealer will see that the equipment you purchase is setup correctly and serviced properly. The power equipment dealer is your professional

resource for information and education on maintenance as well as warranty covered repair. Many dealers have demo's you can try out and can offer you product videos or even CD's for you to view at your convenience. Dealers have specific information, such as the average lifetime of the blades, fuel capacity with run time (how long the unit can run on a full tank), what type of generator you should use, how often you should lubricate the blades, change the filter, etc. You won't find that information on most manufacturers websites. Don't forget - rent a hedge trimmer to see how it fits your needs particularly electric models. Rental companies only rent commercial grade hedge trimmers in both electric and gas so renting a unit will allow you to confirm its place in your equipment inventory.

A top quality commercial gas hedge trimmer will have a five-year manufacturer's warranty. The engine is customarily covered under a separate warranty, possibly up to one year. The best commercial electric hedge trimmers will carry a one-year commercial warranty. Be sure you question the warranty you receive to find out exactly what it covers. Ask if it only covers the product for defects? If so, what parts are covered? Does it cover the blades? What is the blade life for both new growth and thick older growth? Do they suggest sharpening the blades, and how many times can you sharpen the blades before you replace them? Does the dealer stock the blades or do they have to order them, and how long will that take? These are just some of the questions you may want to ask before you purchase your hedge trimmer.

Start with brand names you know and trust. Research the brand by visiting their website, most sites offer a FAQ's section (Frequently Asked Questions) and many even offer testimonials from other customers on their sites. Visiting the manufacturer's website will also offer you local dealer information – where you can further investigate products, warranties and performance.