



Rechargeable tools have the convenience of no cords (Item #1397573).

Going electric

Cordless yard equipment passes this reporter's field test

by TIM TALEVICH



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Tim Talevich fills this month's consumer reporter slot with this behind-the-scenes look at a Costco program. Email questions about this article to buying_smart@costco.com.

One of my favorite pastimes—OK, obsessions—is keeping the yard tidy. Yes, I'm that guy mowing early on Saturday, just after the clock passes 9. But I've always had second thoughts about running gas engines—lawn mower, edge trimmer and leaf blower—for something that's more about vanity than necessity.



So I set out to answer this question: Could I ditch my gas-powered gear for new-generation cordless garden equipment? The answer is yes, and I was surprised by how quickly I became a convert.

Doing my homework

My first step was to look up online reviews of cordless garden tools made by Greenworks (greenworkstools.com),

a Costco supplier. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with lots of enthusiastic new users giving five out of five ratings.

Next, I contacted Costco's home and garden buying team to see what they found. Buyer Ryder Ahlbin informed me that demand for rechargeable tools is definitely on the rise. "The technology has matured so that cordless equipment can compete with traditional gas tools," he says. "There's no drop-off in performance."

The task at hand

My yard is suburban-size, with a lawn, lots of gardens that need edging, and a large driveway and deck that need regular sweeping. With mowing, edging and sweeping, this is about a 75-minute job.

I had a lot of questions about ditching gas for electric. Would there be enough battery power to get everything done or would I run out of juice halfway through and have to pause to recharge? How would the electric equipment match up in terms of pure power? I didn't want to compromise on performance or convenience, which I felt was the case when I tried a corded electric trimmer a few years ago.

First impressions

Last spring, I jumped in with a family of cordless equipment: mower, edger and blower. They all used an 80-volt lithium-ion battery system, which was recommended for optimal performance (see "A look at torque").

First up, the lawn. Initial impressions: *positive*. Starting the mower just required slipping the battery into the case, making adjustments for handle and mowing height, and pressing a button to start the blade spinning. Immediately, I did not miss checking the old mower for gas and oil, hoping the engine would turn over and enduring the loud gas engine.

The mower had plenty of power to cut through the thick spring grass—no performance letdown here. This particular product also had a self-propelling option, but I didn't use it much because I found the mower to be very light and easily pushed.

After mowing, I transferred the battery to the trimmer for edging the gardens, and then to the blower for cleaning everything up. Like the mower, they both performed like champs. At the end, I did a walk-around inspection: nice and tidy, as it should be.

And in response to my question about battery life, here's the rundown: Total project time was 65 minutes. At the end, the 80-volt battery actually had some juice to spare.

Tested over time

Over last spring, summer and fall, I gave all the equipment repeated weekly tests to see how everything held up. Conditions ranged from heavy, damp grass in spring to light touch-up mowings during the summer. In the fall, I was curious about the big challenge of thicker grass and leaves, which I like to mulch when mowing.

The results: I never ran into any situation where I wished I still had my gas equipment. None of the new equipment slowed down, stalled or stopped, even in that unruly area under my neighbor's apple trees.

My take: Cordless lawn equipment did the job for me, and was easy to use. And to top things off, buyer Ahlbin says, Costco is offering a selection of tools with two batteries at a significant savings over retail. ■



GREENWORKS

Today's cordless mowers have as much torque as gas mowers (Item #1397419).

MAINTENANCE IS EASY

Maintaining cordless lawn equipment is simple. You don't need to worry about changing the oil, gas or spark plug. The key steps are:

- Clean the equipment with a rag.
- For the mower, sharpen or replace the blade as needed. The procedure is the same as with a gas mower.
- Store the equipment indoors. You can stack the mower; it's super-light, and there's no gas or oil to leak out.
- Remove the batteries and store them in a cool, dry location. Charge them every two months when not in use to increase their life.—TT

COSTCO CONNECTION

Costco features a cordless lawn mower and a combination blower and string trimmer from Greenworks in select warehouses and on Costco.com.

A look at torque

How does electric compare to gas when it comes to torque—that is, power to get the job done? The cordless equipment I tested at home ran on an 80-volt system:

battery and brushless motors. Here's the rundown.

- String trimmer: Torque comparable to a 26-cubic-centimeter (cc) gas engine.
- Blower: Torque comparable to a 25 cc gas engine.

- Mower: Torque comparable to a 160 cc gas engine.

When you're looking at specs, higher voltage means higher power—which means I feel confident around my yard, because I'm not willing to compromise.—TT