

Charged up: The future of battery-powered equipment

December 23, 2019 - By [Danielle Pesta](#)



Est. reading time: 4:30



Pacific Landscape Management's crew uses Oregon's 120V Professional Series on a job site in Beaverton, Ore. (Photo: Oregon Outdoor Power Equipment)

Landscape contractors are starting to make the switch to battery. But why?

To better understand the possibilities — and benefits — of battery-powered equipment, we talked with experts at Oregon Outdoor Power Equipment, Mulch Mate, Ego and Stihl.

Contractors are looking for better production from their equipment, says Paul Vanderwal, senior global product manager for [Oregon Outdoor Power Equipment](#). "Landscape contractors are utilizing all of their equipment assets to the utmost," he says. "Their priority is to get to the next site as quickly as possible."

Today's battery-powered equipment can provide the production capability contractors need, Vanderwal adds. "Contractors are starting to adopt battery-powered tools at a much higher rate," he says.



Paul Vanderwal

"There has definitely been an increase in sales of battery-powered equipment in the past few years," says Craig Carlson, president of Dawson Manufacturing, the creator of [Mulch Mate](#). "As the lithium-ion cells have improved and the capacity to current ratios get better, I think you continue to see increases in the equipment sales."

For landscape contractors who want to make the switch from gas-powered equipment to battery-powered, the product performance has to be comparable.

"We make sure our tools are developed and benchmarked against typical gas tools, not just other battery tools," Vanderwal says.

Product performance is an important consideration for efficient production.

“The idea is to offer as little compromise as possible when switching from gas to battery,” says Mike Poluka, a product manager with [Stihl](#). “And one way we can achieve that is by offering similar power, acceptable run times and, of course, the best power-to-weight ratio as possible.”

Innovation that performs

Continuous improvement is driving the adoption of battery technology.



Mike Poluka

“Innovation is happening on both the battery tools and also the batteries that power these tools,” Poluka says.

Batteries are being built with more efficient electrical components, he says. In some cases, a tool will have the same components as its gas-powered counterparts.

For example, the recently introduced Stihl FSA 130 battery-powered line trimmer shares the same drive shaft and gear head components as the company’s gas-powered trimmers. “The batteries that power these tools are seeing greater power output and greater capacity,” Poluka says. “It’s innovations like these that are making battery-powered tools attractive to professional end users.”

Carlson gives some credit to the auto industry for encouraging alternative fuel sources. “Since the auto industry is now in full swing behind electric-powered vehicles, I believe the research and development into better battery technology will continue to accelerate,” he says.

Recent innovations in battery technology include more power and longer run times. Gerry Barnaby, director of excitement for [Ego](#), says those two benefits aren’t always found in the same battery.

“For instance, one manufacturer may offer a higher-voltage battery, so it could be assumed that it has a lot more power than a lesser-voltage (battery),” he explains. “But, because the higher-voltage battery has a lower number of amp hours, it will not run as long.”

In addition to considering the voltage and amp hours with commercial battery-powered tools, weatherizing these tools is vital, Vanderwal says.

“This equipment has to run in all kinds of weather and often is stored in the rain on the back of a truck or trailer,” he adds.

There are some financial incentives available to landscapers looking to transition to battery. Some places in California offer rebates toward the purchase of new battery-powered equipment, Barnaby says.

Another benefit to switching? Winning the bid.

“Certain companies require that only battery equipment be used,” Poluka says. “So contractors who have battery-powered equipment are more likely to win the bid for those jobs.”

A viable alternative



Craig Carlson

As with any new technology, it takes time to get people on board.

“People are going to be skeptical any time something new is introduced to market, but I would say try it,” Poluka says.

If contractors are unsure whether battery-powered equipment could be an option for their company, Poluka recommends a hands-on demo. “Stihl has field staff all over the country to help support landscape contractors who are interested in switching to battery,” he adds.

Efficient production is a real issue for landscape contractors. Charging a battery is less complicated than using gas and two-cycle mix while at a job site, Vanderwal says. “Contractors save time not mixing fuel and performing other maintenance,” he adds. “Quicker, better production means more business and more money.”

Barnaby recommends landscape contractors read opinions and reviews on all battery-powered equipment. “Anyone skeptical of switching from gas to battery power needs to only try today’s higher-rated equipment,” he says.

Battery-powered equipment is more user-friendly, Barnaby says. The tools always start, are quieter than gas-powered, don’t release any emissions and produce very little vibration, he says. “The user is sacrificing nothing by transitioning from gas to battery power,” Barnaby says. “The ROI on transitioning is fairly quick as the user no longer has to pay for gas, oil or tuneups.”

Poluka agrees that there’s virtually no learning curve with battery products. “With gas, contractors have to mix gas and oil, learn how to start it, use the choke. That’s all eliminated by switching to battery,” he says.

Every time the cost of gas goes up, so does a landscape contractor’s incentive to switch to battery-powered equipment, Carlson says.

Jump start into the future



Contractors considering their next equipment investment should compare the long-term cost of battery and gas power. (Photo: Stihl)

Battery innovation isn't slowing down, Poluka says.

"We'll see those tools continue to develop," he says. "We will see increased efficiencies, more power and longer run times."

Poluka also expects that new tools will be introduced on battery platforms. "The future is connectivity," he says. "We have a high request for the ability to track products and see how they are performing in their fleets."

For example, Stihl's new platform called Connected will help contractors track equipment better and determine when maintenance is needed. The technology will interface with the equipment and an app on a cellphone. "At the beginning of the day, the landscaper can see how many batteries are in their fleet, fully charged and ready to go," Poluka says. "And throughout the day, they can monitor how much battery capacity they have."

Next year, Stihl plans to introduce the BGA200 professional battery-powered blower. This new unit will be the most powerful blower in Stihl's handheld lineup — including the gas-powered equipment, Poluka says.

Barnaby says there will always be new developments in the battery space. "Six short years ago, Ego offered four tools," he says. "Now, we offer 40-plus with three new innovations coming online in the next few months."

This article is tagged with [battery equipment](#), [battery-powered equipment](#), [battery-powered equipment guide](#), [EGO](#), [manufacturers](#), [Mulch Mate](#), [Oregon Outdoor Power Equipment](#), [Stihl](#) and posted in [1219](#), [Mowing+Maintenance](#)



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