

# Shelton-Mason County Journal - Dedicated to the citizens of Mason County, Washington since 1886

## Mow them down

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By Alex Féthière

*Photo in the print edition:* The twist and edge of Echo's Black Diamond trim line combine for an efficient and precise wacker-mowing experience. (Journal photo by Alex Féthière)

Mowing had never seemed a worthwhile enterprise to me. I resented having a lawn for eight years and turned as much as I could into a vegetable garden. I still had to employ one guy, who did groundskeeping for the school district and moonlighted as a yard man, to mow the grass and handle the bag loads of pin oak leaves.

I slowly killed the lawn by occluding it with potted plants. He would try to weed-wack between the plants and one year killed all my cucumbers.

"They don't call it 'Lawn Island' for nothing," my neighbor quipped as I cursed the sod, breaking it up with a mattock.

In a continuing effort to eschew tillage, I now must do a lot of mowing — and I can't use a conventional mower. The irregular surfaces and spaces of my growing areas require manual detailing with a weed wacker.

I have tested five kinds of attachments on the weed wacker and had to write about my latest and favorite: Echo's Black Diamond line.

Not only does it quickly job over any of the local undesirables without breaking or shredding, but its spiral shape puts a bit of spin on cut material so that it doesn't fly as far. The cutting edge, like an earth auger's, moves material down its length rather than hurling it off.

This is perfect for mowing cover crops. Hitting them with traditional string vaporizes them and flings the fibers out of any useful range. Vetch, oats, rye and peas fall with the same ease and where I need their breakdown to enrich the soil.

Having observed the reproductive cycles of "weeds" (a term of convenience for a plant whose placement I don't like), I can quickly spay them in their tweens. I don't want to lose the organic matter their roots have contributed to the soil by uprooting or chopping it — or cut the rhizomes into fragments and distribute them widely.

Lopping off their flowering heads with leaves has an added benefit: it attracts slugs to the killing fields. Slugs love a chopped salad more than any Angeleno.

I can cruise mow sites an hour afterward and scissor the slugs or gather them for slug tea. They prefer filling up on Slobb Salad (a slug's Cobb usually made of quackgrass, nipplewort and velvet grass with a soupçon of Herb Robert) to eating my seedlings.

Less flung matter also means less injury to plantings. I can select for blackcap raspberries, clovers and elderberries that are slowly spreading without strafing them with atomized weeds.

The Black Diamond experience has been so revelatory that I want to try every conceivable weed wacker attachment and customize them by purpose. As with most tools, the right one makes the difference between a pleasant task and an onerous chore.

For a couple of years, I used Weed Warrior blades, which distinguish themselves against woodier plants up to evergreen huckleberry. Because they murder drip watering lines, I'm happy to arsenal them in favor of the Black Diamond. My land's plant profile has changed enough that such heavy guns are no longer on the first string.

Every stage of a permaculture planting benefits from a dynamic toolbox — up until the vanishing point where our interventions are minimal, because the loops we engineered have closed and the cycles are self-perpetuating.

■ *Alex Féthière has lived on Harstine Island long enough to forget New York City, where he built community gardens and double-dug his suburban sod into a victory garden. He can be reached at [onlandist@gmail.com](mailto:onlandist@gmail.com).*

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