

Interest in native plants has increased in recent years, resulting in the need to make native seed collections. The basic method of harvesting seeds in the wild is to hand-strip seed off individual seedheads, a time consuming and labor intensive field operation. While this method works fine, seed yield per hour of labor is low. At the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Big Flats Plant Materials Center, we collect native seeds and test various techniques to improve seed harvesting efficiency.

We thought using a gas power hedge trimmer might have promise. Many trimmers are available on the market and can be purchased at any horticultural supply center or local garden store. We purchased a hedge trimmer with a 61-cm-long (24-in) cutting bar and a plastic tub that measured 66 cm long, 51 cm wide, and 15 cm deep (26 x 20 x 6 in).

One 66-cm side of the tub was removed and the tub was attached to the cutting bar by removing the bolts holding the blades together, inserting the tub on top of the blades, and then re-bolting. Our particular tub has a curved top edge that ideally wraps around the handle of the trimmer—a hose clamp attaches the tub to the handle and makes the whole assembly more secure. The unit is then ready for field use (Figure 1).

By using a scythe motion, start the cutting blade action as you swing



Figure 1 • A modified gas powered hedge trimmer ready to harvest native plant seeds.

Photo by Kas Dumroese

HARVESTING NATIVE SEEDS WITH A GAS HEDGE TRIMMER

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the unit across seedheads you wish to collect. As you move the cutting blade, severed seedheads fall into the tub. Continue this action until

the tub is full and then, by tilting the unit, dump the collected seedheads into another container. Collected seedheads can be processed back at the nursery or seed cleaning facility.

This is a very simple and effective method. One person can harvest significantly more seed in a day than other methods we have tested. Since the unit is very maneuverable, it allows the operator to be selective in what is harvested.

On days with a light breeze, cutting into the wind helps seedheads fall into the collection tub. We have

successfully harvested seedheads of several Poaceae, including hairgrass (*Deschampsia flexuosa* (L.) Trin.), poverty oatgrass (*Danthonia spicata* (L.) Beauv. ex Roemer & JA Schultes), red fescue (*Festuca rubra* L.), and numerous forb species.

REFERENCE

[ITIS] Integrated Taxonomic Information System. 1998. Biological names. Version 4.0 [on-line database]. URL: <http://www.itis.usda.gov/plantproj/itis/itis-query.html> (accessed 16 Feb 2000).

ABSTRACT

A plastic tub can easily be attached to a gas-powered hedge trimmer, resulting in an efficient, highly-maneuverable piece of equipment for collecting native plant seeds.

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