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# 11 easy ways to prep a lawn mower for winter storage

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After a long mowing season, a few simple maintenance steps can prolong the life of your mower. / MCT

“After a long mowing season, you may be tempted to just wheel your lawn mower into your garage or shed and drop a blanket over it and forget about it until the mowing season arrives,” said Jeff Linderman, landscaping and outdoor power equipment [specialist](#) for RepairClinic.com. “That’s a very common but potentially destructive and expensive mistake. A few simple maintenance steps completed now will dramatically reduce the likelihood of engine failure and expensive repairs when you need your lawn mower again.”

Here are 11 easy ways to prepare a lawn mower for winter or off-season storage:

1. Read the lawn mower owner’s manual.
2. Clean the deck and undercarriage. A hose, putty knife and car wash detergent are sufficient [tools](#) for clearing grass and debris from the deck and undercarriage. Clean it down to the painted metal.
3. Degrease. Spray a degreaser on oil [stains](#). Allow the degreaser to sit for 10-15 minutes before wiping with a clean cloth. Rinse with a hose.
4. Check the blade and replace, if needed. Look for bends, dents and other damage to the blade. To prevent risk of injury, the blade

should be replaced right away if any damage is found. Also, a sharp blade is important to a proper cut. Dull blades tear the grass, rather than cut cleanly. A blade should be sharpened every season and replaced every one to three years, depending on

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usage. A universal blade is not recommended, because of safety issues related to the metal used and problems with proper mounting. Only the blade recommended by the manufacturer should be used.

5. Clean the fuel cap. Use a [paintbrush](#) to brush away particles and buildup on the fuel cap. Before closing the fuel cap, inspect the vent for blockage and replace it if there's blockage.

6. Replace the spark plug. "A spark plug should be replaced at least once per season, even if it appears to be working fine," said Linderman. "People don't realize how important the small spark plug is to the efficient operation of mowers."

Over time, a spark plug's performance will degrade because of carbon buildup and a weakened electrode. This degrades engine performance and requires the engine to use more fuel. Spark plugs are sold pre-gapped so installation is simple. Only the engine manufacturer's recommended spark plug should be used, as using an alternative model can cause damage to the engine.

7. Spray lubricant on any bare metal undercarriage parts to prevent rusting.

8. Clean or replace the air filter. Air filters prevent debris and dust from entering the lawn mower's carburetor and engine. Foam filters may be cleaned with water and a small amount of detergent, but there is high risk of tearing. Pleated, paper air filters deteriorate quickly so replacement is recommended.

9. Replace the fuel filter. There is high risk to fuel filters if cleaned, so replacement is recommended.

10. Replace the oil. "Engine oil should be replaced at least once per season or every 25 hours of use," said Linderman. "Like vehicle engine oil, it should be golden or amber in color when you check it. It darkens with use due to carbon from combustion of the fuel." Check the mower owner's manual for how to handle oil replacement. Most small engine repair shops and auto parts stores have a free recycling program for used oil.

11. Add fuel stabilizer. Add fuel stabilizer to fresh fuel to prevent carburetor buildup or clogging. Follow the owner's manual for instructions on leaving fuel in the engine during storage, as this varies by manufacturer.

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