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Mower needs prepping for winter storage



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Lawn mowers need a little maintenance before you put them away for the winter. Begin with cleaning.

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Because of the drought, your lawn mower probably hasn't gotten much of a workout lately.

But before you wheel it away for the season, you should do some maintenance to make sure it's in good repair next spring, says Jeff Linderman of RepairClinic.com.

Here are his tips.

- 1. Read the owner's manual.**
- 2. Clean the deck and undercarriage.**

A hose, putty knife and car wash detergent are sufficient tools. Clean 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.

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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 usage. A universal blade is not recommended due to 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 is any.

6. Replace the spark plug.

A spark plug should be replaced at least once per season, even if it appears to be working fine, Linderman says.

Over time, a spark plug's performance will degrade due to carbon build-up 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 because using an alternative model can cause damage to the engine.

"People don't realize how important the small spark plug is to the efficient operation of mowers," Linderman says.

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 are known to deteriorate quickly, so replacement is recommended.

9. Replace the fuel filter.

10. Replace the oil.

"Engine oil should be replaced at least once per season or every 25 hours of use," Linderman says. "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."

Recycle your oil. Most small engine repair shops and auto parts stores have a free recycling program for used oil.

(In the Quad-Cities, the Scott Area Recycling Center, 5640 Carey Ave., Davenport, provides free recycling for oil, oil filters and antifreeze.)

11. Add fuel stabilizer.

Adding fuel stabilizer to fresh fuel prevents carburetor buildup or clogging. Follow the owner's manual for instructions on leaving fuel in the engine during storage since that varies by manufacturer.

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