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Kathy Van Mullekom blogs on gardening and home in Hampton Roads.

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RepairClinic.com: 7 ways to make your lawn mower run like new

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RepairClinic.com, an online store for replacement parts for home appliances, outdoor power equipment and HVAC equipment, shares some money-saving tips about prepping lawn mowers for spring.

"Many people wait until their yards are overgrown to take out their lawn mowers and other yard care equipment out of storage," says Jeff Linderman, resident small engine expert at RepairClinic.com, in a news release.

"However, just a few simple steps now can dramatically improve engine efficiency, reduce emissions, prevent costly repairs and extend the life of outdoor power equipment."

Here are seven ways to keep lawn mowers running like new:

1. Use a clean air filter.

The air filter has the important job of preventing dirt, dust and debris from entering the carburetor and engine. It should be cleaned or changed every 25 hours or once per mowing season. Pleated, paper air filters must be replaced. Foam air filters can be cleaned with hot water and a small amount of detergent and then left to air dry before being saturated with engine oil and reinstalled.

2. Use a clean fuel filter.

Fuel filters should be replaced; they cannot be cleaned. Owner's manuals should be consulted for the proper way to install a fuel filter, as it varies by model.

3. Replace the oil.

Engine oil should be replaced at least once per season or every 25 hours of use. Every eight hours of use, it's wise to check it. Like vehicle engine oil, it should be golden or amber in color. As it ages, it darkens. It's best to check your mower's owner's manual for the recommended way to handle oil replacement. Most small engine repair shops and auto parts stores have a free recycling program for used oil.

4. Replace the spark plug.

"A spark plug should be replaced at least one 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 due to carbon build-up and a weakened electrode. This

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dramatically increases emissions, reduces engine performance and requires the engine to use more fuel. Spark plugs are easy to replace and they are pre-gapped. It's important to use only the engine manufacturer's recommended spark plug, as using an alternative model can be damaging.

5. Check the blade.

A sharp blade is important to a proper cut. Dull blades tear the grass, rather than cut cleanly. Regularly check mower blades for dullness and damage. A blade should be sharpened every season and replaced every one to three years, depending on usage. If bends, dents and other damage to the blade are found, it should be replaced right away. Such damage can cause dangerous accidents in operation. Always use the manufacturer's recommended blade. A universal blade is not recommended, due to safety issues.

6. Check tire pressure.

Periodically, use a tire pressure gauge to ensure consistent tire pressure. Tires with varying pressure will result in uneven or poor cutting.

7. Clean the undercarriage.

After every use, use a hose to remove grass clippings and debris build up in the undercarriage. Be sure to turn off the mower and disconnect the spark plug first.

RepairClinic's free online **repair help system** empowers do-it-yourselfers to fix common problems associated with outdoor power equipment, home appliances and HVAC equipment. DIYers can enter a model number to choose from a list of common symptoms for that particular model, troubleshoot and watch expertly-produced videos to learn the most likely causes and conditions and purchase the correct part.

RepairClinic.com stocks more than one million parts and accessories for 150 brands of lawn mowers, small engines, string trimmers and other handheld outdoor power equipment, furnaces, air conditioners, air handlers, heat pumps, washing machines, dryers, dishwashers, vacuum cleaners, lawn mowers, snowblowers, leaf blowers, edgers and many other products, according to the company.

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About The Author

Kathy Van Mullekom has gardened all her life. Today, she and husband Ken care for about an acre in York County, Va., where most of her plants are native species meant to attract bees, butterflies and birds. She picks plants for their multi-season interest. Kathy has taken landscape design and other horticulture-related classes at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Va. She's also remodeled, decorated and built almost a dozen houses in the Hampton Roads area. You can also read her **weekly column**.



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