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Proper care of your mower will keep it running like new for years to come. / Samuel M. Simpkins / File / The Tennessean

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Keep lawn mower running like new

RepairClinic, a free online site that helps do-it-yourselfers fix common problems associated with outdoor power equipment, home appliances and HVAC equipment, offers these tips to keep up a lawn mower:

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. They should be replaced; they cannot be cleaned.

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3. Replace the oil. Engine oil should be replaced at least once a season or every 25 hours of use. Every eight hours of use, check it. Like vehicle engine oil, it should be golden or amber in color. As it ages, it darkens. 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. Over time, a spark plug's performance will degrade due to carbon build-up and a weakened electrode. This dramatically increases emissions, reduces engine performance and requires the engine to use more fuel.

5. Check the blade. Dull blades tear the grass, rather than cut cleanly. A blade should be sharpened every season and replaced every one to three years. If bends, dents and other damage are found, it should be replaced right away.

6. Check 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 buildup in the undercarriage. Turn off the mower and disconnect the spark plug first.

Buy or build water barrel

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You can buy a 55-gallon rain barrel from The Cumberland River Compact for \$40 at cumberlandrivercompact.org/make-a-difference/rain-barrel — or you can make your own. The website gives a list of supplies and instructions.

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