

Seven lawn mower care mistakes to avoid



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In addition to raking leaves and cleaning the gutters, one of the bigger fall yard chores is preparing your lawn mower and other equipment for winter storage.

"Maintenance and preparation now can prevent problems and ensure the equipment starts without issues when needed again in the spring," said Jeff Linderman, outdoor power equipment specialist for RepairClinic.com, an online store with replacement parts for outdoor power equipment.

Here are seven common lawn mower and outdoor power equipment care mistakes homeowners should avoid as they prepare equipment for winter storage:

1. Ignoring the equipment owner's manuals.

It is important to follow the equipment manufacturers' directions on equipment maintenance, as procedures vary greatly by model and manufacturer. The owner's manuals also provide critical instructions on user safety.

Always wear gloves and disable the equipment before completing any maintenance or repair work. In lawn mowers, for example, the spark plug wire and boot should be removed to prevent the engine from accidentally starting.

2. Failing to thoroughly clean.

"Equipment is often dirtier than it appears on the surface," Linderman said. "Grass clippings and debris build up near key components and need to be removed prior to storage.

"For lawn mowers, this debris buildup in the deck and undercarriage can cause performance issues. Use a hose, putty knife and a small amount of car wash detergent to clean thoroughly down to the painted metal."

3. Letting key components rust.

Spray a lubricant such as WD-40 or silicone spray on any exposed bare metal; this is particularly important with lawn mower undercarriages. Also, inspect equipment for oil stains and apply degreaser where found. Be sure to allow the degreaser enough time to work (approximately 10-15 minutes) before wiping with a clean cloth and rinsing with a hose.

4. Forcing equipment to work with clogged filters.

Clean or replace air and fuel filters, where equipped; filters prevent debris from entering the carburetor or engine, which can cause permanent damage.

5. Allowing fuel to grow stale, creating buildup that can clog up carburetors.

Add fuel stabilizer to fresh fuel to slow the development of damaging buildup. Follow the owner's manuals for directions on draining or leaving fuel in the fuel tank during storage; this varies by equipment and manufacturer.

6. Not replacing damaged parts and failing to address performance changes.

Take time to thoroughly inspect equipment for any damage and replace parts as needed. Lawn mower blades that are warped or bent should be replaced right away, as this may lead to prematurely-worn bearings and serious safety issues.

"If there are notable changes in equipment performance such as difficulty starting the engine, troubleshoot right away and fix minor repairs now to prevent costlier repairs later," Linderman said. "Many lawn mower and other common yard care equipment repairs are simple, low-cost do-it-yourself projects. "

7. Storing in unsuitable locations.

A dry, covered area such as a garage or shed is an ideal location for outdoor power equipment storage. However, position them away from cleaning supplies and other chemicals that could damage the equipment if spilled. For safety purposes, do not store equipment in basements, crawlspaces or other living spaces.