

CUTTING EDGE MAINTENANCE

Here are some tips for keeping your lawnmower running smoothly from year to year.



Spring is here, and for many of us that means dragging out the old lawnmower and crossing our fingers as we pull the cord or turn the key. Some may even have to chisel through inches of dried grass just to find the keyhole. That isn't an enjoyable spring tradition for anyone, but the good thing is with a little bit of regular maintenance, you won't have to do the same thing next year.

Here are some basic lawnmower maintenance tips that will help make your first mow a little less stressful, as well as a few things to do this fall before you put the mower away for the winter.

Out with the old

Ideally, you would have drained the tank at the end of the season by letting the mower run dry, but for the purpose of this article, we'll assume you didn't. Drain all gas and oil out of the mower if it's been in there all winter. Gas goes bad in about a month and if it sits in the tank for too long, alcohol in the gas will become destructive to rubber pieces inside the tank and eventually to the carburetor.

Keep it clean!

Scrape away all the debris that built up on your mower last year. Grass clippings, grease and dirt will clog the motor, especially where air has to move to keep the engine cool. Another reason to keep your mower clean is to reduce the threat of spreading lawn diseases around your highly-susceptible, freshly-mowed lawn.

To clean your mower, empty the gas tank and disconnect the spark plug wire. Stand the mower on its side and blast the underside of the deck (where the blade is) with a hose to loosen the debris. Then scrub the area with a soapy brush until the dirt and debris are gone. Some people find spraying the deck with vegetable oil to be somewhat effective for keeping the mower clean.

Spark plugs

Clean your spark plugs every spring and if they're showing any type of wear, replace them. It's a good idea to apply some anti-seize compound, as well, so it's easier to change the plugs next time.

Oil issues

If you have a four-cycle (or four-stroke) engine, be sure to check the oil regularly. If you have a two-cycle (or two-stroke) motor, there's no oil to check, it's mixed with the gasoline. Just make sure you use the appropriate oil—check the owner's manual to be certain.



Each issue, *Green Profit* organizes a ready-made handout on livegood and hardgood topics in the form of a magazine page you can tear out, even giving it to customers who want questions answered, myths debunked and a reason to be in a garden environment, regardless of the season. You provide the customers and example products; we'll do the rest.



Up and Running

Some spring maintenance tips for a few more common pieces of yard equipment:

Leaf Blowers/Edgers/Trimmers

- Clean or replace spark plug every year.
- Make sure all components are in operating condition.
- Check that all straps, handles, nuts and bolts are secure.
- Check that power cords are not frayed and are in working condition.

Rotary Tillers

- Check that all engine components are properly lubricated and in good operating condition.
- Sharpen tines.

- Make sure tires are properly inflated.
- Check that control levers, connections, nuts and bolts are secure and operating correctly.

Chain Saws

- Clean or replace spark plug every year.
- Lubricate the clutch drum bearing.
- Check the bar for excessive wear or bent rails and replace if necessary.
- Clean the cooling fins on the flywheel, the cylinder fins, area outside the carburetor and starter housing with a brush or light air source.
- Check the fuel filter and replace if necessary.
- Have the carburetor professionally checked and adjusted periodically.

When checking your four-stroke engine oil, use the dipstick like normal and if the level is low, but the oil is clean, just add oil. If your mower's oil seems dirty but the level is fine, go ahead and mow the lawn before you change it. The oil will heat up and drain much easier. Once it's drained, just refill with fresh oil. If the level is low and the oil is dirty, add some clean oil, mow and drain.

Blade on Blade

Experts recommend sharpening your lawnmower blade every two months during the cutting season. Why? Because dull blades will rip at grass rather than cutting cleanly and rough cuts make grass susceptible to disease. You can do it yourself with a file—just follow the angle of the existing cutting edge—

or you can have it professionally sharpened. Either way, be sure to detach the spark plug wire so the mower won't accidentally start up while your hands are near the blade.

This Fall . . .

When the lawnmowing season ends this year, empty the gas tank by letting the mower run dry and leave it empty all winter. This will not only help keep your mower in tip-top shape but also save you work the following spring.

Like any piece of equipment, it'll take a little bit of maintenance to keep your mower at its peak performance, but it's well worth any effort. If a green, healthy lawn is your goal, it all starts with well-maintained tools. 🍃

BY BILL CALKINS WITH HELP FROM THE EXPERTS AT DOCTORMOWER.COM