

Tips listed to prepare lawn mower

NEWARK, Del. — Spring has arrived, and the grass is green and growing. That means it's time to make sure your power mower is ready to go.

If you didn't drain the old gasoline from the fuel tank and carburetor last fall, your mower may not start on cue this spring. Gasoline that sits for a long time forms a gum that plugs a mower's carburetor jets. After draining the fuel, dissolve the gum deposits with methyl alcohol, says University of Delaware extension agricultural engineer Tom Williams.

The next step is to remove and service the air cleaner according

to manufacturer's instructions. If your mower has an oil foam type breather (which resembles a household sponge) remove it and wash in kerosene or hot, soapy water. After it dries, add more oil. Williams says air cleaners should be serviced after eight hours of use, or once a month, whichever comes first. If your mower picks up a great deal of dust, the air cleaner will need more frequent service.

If your mower has a four-stroke cycle engine, drain the dirty oil from the crankcase and replace with fresh oil of the proper weight. The oil should be replaced after every 25 hours of use. Williams

says it's best to drain the oil when the engine is hot.

Two-stroke engines don't use crankcase oil. Instead, lubricating oil is mixed with the gasoline. Again, it's better not to use old gasoline. Also, with this type of mower it's important to clean the exhaust ports of carbon deposits. Periodically remove the muffler and ream out the ports with a smooth, wooden dowel.

The next step in readying your mower for spring is to clean and regap the spark plug. It's probably better to replace a plug that is two years old or older, says Williams.

With the spark plug wire disconnected, remove and sharpen

the blade, then balance it to prevent excessive engine vibration. Buy a balancer at a hardware store, or check the balance by suspending the blade on a knife edge in a vise. Coat the blade with oil to prevent rust.

Mower capacity is reduced when the housing is full of grass and dirt, the specialist points out. Remove wet grass and dirt from under the mower housing after each use to prevent rust and corrosion. Always do this with the spark plug wire disconnected to keep the engine from firing accidentally when the blade is turned.

Clean clippings and dirt from around the cylinder cooling fins. Finally, lubricate wheel bearings and moving parts.

Williams will present two free

demonstrations on lawn mower care and safety at the University of Delaware Cooperative Extension Service's Lawn and Garden Expo on April 28. The demonstrations will take place at 11:20 a.m. and 2:20 p.m. The Expo, held on the grounds of the College of Agricultural Sciences on Route 896 in Newark, will feature garden tours, a plant clinic, information on vegetable gardening and tree care, and demonstrations of mowers and tillers.

The Expo is a new feature of the College of Agricultural Sciences' annual Ag Day, a family fun day that includes a petting zoo, games and exhibits, food, and bluegrass music. Most events are free. The hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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