

Maintenance Prolongs Lawn Mower Life

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Each year, the arrival of spring is heralded by the sound of lawns being mowed. If you want your lawn mower to last from year to year, treat its engine with the same respect you show your car's engine, said a machinery specialist in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"A good lawn mower should last 8 to 10 years," said James Garthe, instructor in agricultural and biological engineering. "Too many people pay \$300 for a mower, then get a new one a year or two later because it wasn't maintained properly."

Read the owner's manual and follow the directions for maintenance, Garthe said. Pay strict attention to the viscosity and quality of oil used in the engine.

"The wrong oil shortens your engine's life by causing overheating and excessive wear on valve guides, seals, and main bearings," he said. "Use high quality engine oils containing additives that buffer corrosive acids generated during fuel combustion."

Keeping the air filter clean also extends your mower's life. "The air filter keeps dust, dirt, sand and grass from being drawn into the engine," Garthe said. "If the air filter is dirty, minute particles of sili-

con eventually can get into the internal moving parts, wearing them down and pitting them."

"A dirty air filter also keeps air from getting to the engine and affects the air-fuel ratio that governs combustion," Garthe said. "The engine has to work harder, wasting energy and fouling the spark plug with deposits."

Check or change the engine's spark plug at either the beginning or the end of each mowing season. "Unscrew the plug and check the gap with a round spark plug gauge," Garthe said. "Carefully scrape deposits from the plug with a pocket knife or wire brush. Take care, however, not to damage the porcelain shank. If the porcelain is broken, the plug won't transfer heat away from the engine as it is designed to. If this happens, replace the plug."

Before storing the mower for winter, change the oil. "Late fall is the best time to change the oil and check the spark plug to make sure that your mower will be ready to go next year," Garthe said. "Don't keep old oil in the engine until spring. Solids, water, and acids that have accumulated in the oil over the summer will corrode your engine."

"Change the oil while it's still warm," he said "Contaminants are

suspended in warm oil and will drain out. If you wait until it cools, these materials settle to the bottom of the crankcase and solidify into a thick gum."

If possible, remove gasoline from the tank before storing the mower, either by siphoning or by taking off the tank. Consult your owner's manual to determine the best method for your mower. "Keeping old gasoline in the engine over winter can make it difficult to start next spring," Garthe

said.

If you can't remove the gasoline, put a fuel stabilizer designed for small gas engines in the tank and run the mower for a few minutes before storing it. "A good fuel stabilizer can extend the storage life of the gas by up to six months."

If you keep your mower in a damp location, consider coating it with a silicon spray before storing it. "This creates a film that keeps

moisture out and discourages rust," Garthe said.

Covering the mower with a plastic tarp also helps keep out moisture and rodents. "Mice have been known to chew wires and other engine parts, and even to build nests in the mower," Garthe said. A plastic tarp will discourage these pests more than cloth, which mice chew up for nesting material.

"These simple steps may keep you from having to buy a new mower next year," Garthe said.

Education Conference Focuses On School-To-Work Transition

UNIVERSITY PARK (Central Co.) — An international conference centering on vocational students' transition from school to the working world will be coordinated by the Center for Professional Personnel Development in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences. The conference, which is open to those with an interest in vocational education issues, will be held June 18-21 at Seven Springs Mountain Resort near Somerset.

The Pennsylvania Vocational Education Conference will open Sunday, June 18 with a talk by J.D.

Hoye, director of the national School-To-Work Opportunities Office in the U.S. Department of Education. Hoye will discuss governmental programs that help students make the transition into careers as well as the impact the 1994 elections might have on federal programs.

Hoye will also host a question-and-answer session, Monday, June 19. Various workshops will be held through the rest of the conference, focusing on such themes as developing and assessing local School-To-Work programs; making partnerships with businesses, comparisons of different school districts' technical preparation programs across Pennsylvania, preparing diverse student populations for local School-To-Work programs, learning job skills to prepare for the 21st century and incorporating community service into vocational education.

On Tuesday, a panel discussion will center on "School-To-Work Transition Opportunities in the NAFTA Countries."

Panel members include Humberto Dominguez, director of secondary schools in Mexico's Ministry of Education; Tom Norton, president of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges; and Frank Linnehan, a business consultant based in Haddonfield, N.J.

Wednesday's workshops will include a presentation on how to make the most of School-To-Work opportunities at the local level. Riley Harrison, deputy managing director of fleet operations for the City of Philadelphia, will be the featured speaker.

The deadline for conference registration is June 9.

Registration fee for the conference is \$40. Room and meal packages start at \$113 per person, which includes breakfast and dinner.

For information, contact Carol Conroy, PVEC-95 conference chair, 323 Agricultural Administration Building, University Park, PA 16802. Conroy also can be contacted at (814) 863-3824.

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