

Bluestem Breezes
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See You Next Spring Lawnmower!

For most of the summer, I had difficulty keeping up with the mowing of our yard due to timely rains – I mowed which meant it was time again to rain! Now, I almost miss mowing. Almost!

As we're reaching the end of the mowing season, now is the optimal time to service your lawnmower. This week, K-State Specialist Ward Upham offers guidance on steps to take before tucking your lawnmower in for the winter:

Make sure you drain the gas tank of gasoline-powered engines or use a gasoline stabilizer. Untreated gasoline can become thick and gummy.

A few drops of oil squirted inside the spark plug hole (after you remove the spark plug) will help lubricate the cylinder. While you have the spark plug removed, replace it with a new one.

If your equipment has a battery, clean the battery terminals, which usually corrode during the season. A wire-bristle brush is a good tool for doing this. The battery can then be removed or connected to a battery monitor that will keep it charged over winter. If you remove the battery, be sure to store it in a protected location for the winter (a cool basement works best).

Now is also an excellent time to sharpen mower blades so they'll be ready next spring. Sharpening rotary mower blades is fairly straightforward. The following steps will guide you through this process:

- * Check the blade for major damage. If you can't fix it, it likely will need to be replaced.
- * Remove grass and debris from the blade with a moist cloth. Dry before beginning to sharpen the cutting edge.
- * Remove nicks from the cutting edge, using a grinding wheel or hand-file.
- * If using a grinding wheel, match the existing edge angle to the wheel. If hand-filing, file at the same angle as the existing edge.
- * Grind or file until the edge is 1/32 inch, about the size of a period.
- * Particularly with a grinding wheel, avoid overheating the blade as this may warp it.
- * Clean the blade with solvent or oil, much like if you were cleaning a gun, for optimum winter storage. Avoid using water because it will promote rust.

Following these tips can help you better prepare your mower for winter storage and also save you some steps this coming spring.

For additional information, visit the Extension Office (215 Kansas, Courthouse, Alma; kamayer@ksu.edu; 765-3821). For Bluestem Breezes archives, check out wabaunsee.ksu.edu.