Spring lawn care starts with proper lawnmower winterization

K-State's McKernan shares maintenance tips to prepare for storage

At a glance: K-State horticulture expert Matt McKernan reminds homeowners to service your lawnmower before putting it away for the winter.

Taking care of a home lawn can be time consuming but rewarding for many homeowners. Kansas State University horticulture expert Matt McKernan said as mowing season ends, it is important to service mowers before storing them for winter.

Always begin lawn mower maintenance by disconnecting the battery cable or spark plug wire to prevent accidental engine starts and ensure safety, McKernan recommends.

"Make sure you drain the gas tank of gasoline-powered engines, run the engine until it is out of gas, or use a gasoline stabilizer," McKernan said. "Untreated gasoline can become thick and gummy."

Spark plugs should be replaced. Before putting the new one in, place a few drops of clean oil inside the spark plug hole in the engine and turn over the engine a few times to lubricate the cylinder. Battery terminals usually corrode during the season, so they should be cleaned with a wire-bristle brush before being removed and stored for winter.

"If you remove the battery, be sure to store it in a protected location for the winter; a cool basement works best," McKernan said.

Cleaning and storing mowers properly is just one part of end of-season-care. McKernan also suggests using this time to sharpen mower blades.

"Sharpening rotary mower blades is fairly straightforward," said McKernan, who listed the steps to guide the process:

- Check for major blade damage and replace what can't be fixed.
- Remove grass and debris with a damp cloth. Dry the blade before sharpening.
- Use a grinding wheel or hand-file to remove nicks from the cutting edge. 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.
- File edges to 1/32 inch, or about the size of a period at the end of a sentence.
- Avoid overheating the blade as this could damage it.
- For optimum winter storage, clean the blade with solvent or oil. 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 (next) spring," McKernan said.



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