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Prepare Your Lawn Mower for Winter

As winter hits we all get to cross “mowing the lawn” off our to-do lists for a while. But before completely move on from lawn mowing, Kansas State University horticulture expert Ward Upham recommends a few mower maintenance steps before we let them sit idle in our sheds for the winter.

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

Spark plugs should be replaced. Before putting the new one in, place a few drops of oil inside the hole 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),” Upham said.

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

“Sharpening rotary mower blades is fairly straightforward,” said Upham, 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 of 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 this coming spring,” Upham said