KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension
Meadowlark District

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Prepare Your Lawn and Mower for Winter

As winter hits, we start to end our mowing season. This means you should do a final mowing to set your lawn up for success this winter. It is also the perfect time to do a few maintenance steps before letting the mower sit idle in our sheds for the winter.

Typically, cool season grass should get one last mow in late October to early November. Look for weather that is consistently in the upper 40s during the day and 20s to 30s as the signal to do the last mow. Given our warm fall, now is a great time to get that done. Some homeowners are tempted to leave their lawn tall, thinking that it can help insulate the plants. However, tall grass will fall over and create a dense mat, which allows disease to flourish. Too short and it can cause injury to the grass. Instead, mow at the normal recommended height, which is 2.5 to 3.5 inches for tall fescue, and 2 to 3 inches for Kentucky Bluegrass.

After the final mow, you can start maintaining your lawn mower by paying attention to the gas tank. Drain the tank of any gas-powered engines, or you can add a gasoline stabilizer to the tank. If gas is left in the tank untreated, it can become thick and gummy, causing issues for you in the spring.

Second, 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. It is best to store the batter in a protected location, like a cool basement.

While you are doing this winter preparation, it is a good time to go ahead and do some other maintenance like sharpening mower blades. If there is major damage to the blades you may want to replace them. If you only see minor damage, you can either pay for them to be sharpened or sharpen them yourself.

To sharpen a mower blade, start by removing any dirt, grass, or other debris with a damp cloth and dry the blade. File or grind the blade down to remove any nicks from the cutting edge. If you have a grinding wheel, hold the blade against the wheel to match the existing angle, and run the blade across the wheel, applying light and even pressure as you go. A hand file will work similarly, just slower. With a grinding wheel, it is important to check that the blade is not overheating as you sharpen, as this could damage the blade. Check for major blade damage and replace what can't be fixed. Once it is sharpened, clean the blade with solvent or oil. Do not use water as it can cause rust.

Taking the time to care for your lawnmower now will save you time and money in the spring. If you have any questions about this, or other lawn care issues, make sure to reach out to your local extension office!