

Choose a mower that's right for you

With spring in the air, it's time to pack up the snowblower and crank up the old lawnmower. But will your old mower make it through the spring and summer, or is it time to consider buying a new one? For many consumers, the thought of choosing a new lawnmower is intimidating. With all the different kinds of mowers on the market, how do you know which one is right for your lawn?

Size up your lawn. For large lawns of half an acre or larger, you may want to consider a tractor or riding mower. Riding mowers have an average width cut of 30 inches and 11 horsepower and cost \$900 and \$2,000. These tractors can be adapted to plow snow in the winter. Some popular brands include Murray and Honda.

If your yard is less than half an acre, chances are you'll be better off with a push mower. There are two types to consider: standard and self-propelled. Both range from 20 to 22 inches in width cut and have 3.5 to 6 horsepower. A self-propelled model lets you steer without straining to push it, as it virtually moves itself. This mower is ideal for hilly lawns. Standard push mowers range from \$129 to \$227, while self-propelled push mowers are \$268 to \$530.

Power it up. Next you'll need to decide on either a gas or electric mower. "Both have several positive features, and the choice really comes down to the conveniences and needs of the users," said Marshall Avison, seasonal tools merchant for The Home Depot.

There are two kinds of gas mowers: a two-cycle and a four-cycle. A two-cycle mower mixes the gas and oil in one tank. The fuel is better distributed as you mow, but you must make the mixture yourself. A four-cycle gas mower places the gas and oil in two separate tanks. You'll still have to put the gas and oil in yourself, but you won't have to measure them. A four-cycle mower

won't always distribute the fuel evenly on hills and may stall.

Gas mowers are traditionally thought of as the American lawnmower of choice, but electric mowers are gaining in popularity. They don't emit exhaust fumes and won't pollute the air. Electric mowers can be either cordless or rechargeable or may come with a cord to plug into a household outlet. The cords will usually only stretch 100 feet. A cordless model only needs to be plugged in overnight, and the next day it will cut for 1.5 to 3 hours, or up to a half acre. Cordless models use less electricity than the mowers with plugs.

Electric mowers are generally maintenance free. You won't need to add gas or oil. They are also very quiet. Popular brands of electric mowers include Black and Decker and Ryobi.

To mulch or not to mulch. Mulching is a process that uses grass clippings to refertilize the lawn. Mulching is easy, good for the environment and is the best source of nitrogen for the plant roots.

To avoid the mulch leaving lines in your grass, mulching should be done on a dry day rather than when the grass is wet and heavy. Mulch mowers are available in both gas and electric models, and almost all mowers can be adapted to mulchers with an easy to install kit.

New products for gadget gurus. Like most products today, constant improvements are making mowing easier and more enjoyable. Many mowers have a release bar which automatically shuts off the mower if you need to step away. Some newer models also have a "blade brake clutch" which lets the engine run while the blade stops. This stops your from restarting the mower every time. Some lawn mowers even come in three-speed models, allowing people of different sizes and abilities to use the same mower.

Wade into wetland information in class

"Wetlands for Lay Folks," one of the adult education courses of the University of Michigan Matthaei Botanical Gardens, will look at what a wetland is and why we care about it.

The class will meet 7-9 p.m. Thursdays, May 30 and June 6, and 9 a.m. to noon Saturdays, June 1 and 8.

Cost is \$65. Call (313) 998-7061 for information.

The course will examine how sci-

entists and government regulators define wetlands and how these definitions differ from the public's concept of wetlands.

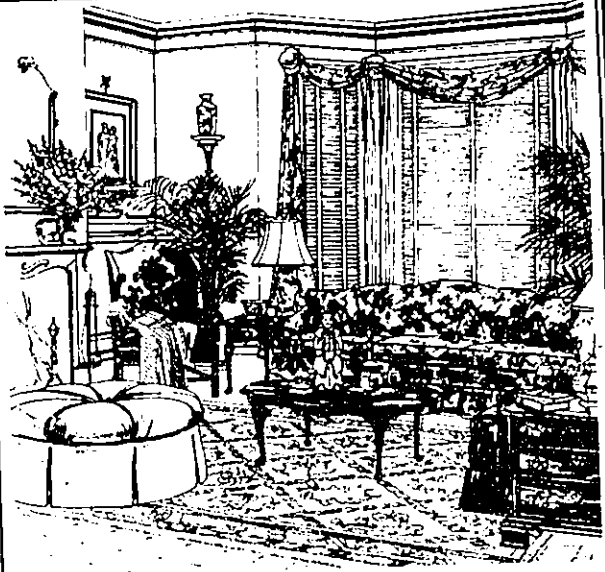
It will look at how wetlands differ from one another with respect to their water regimes and consequent plant communities, and what qualities or functions of wetlands lend to their importance.

Field trips will be made to a number of local wetlands, so be prepared to get wet.

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