

## GREENUP and MOW and EDGE and TRIM



Work by the yard: Sue Kluz of Canton loosens a nut on her lawn mower so she can remove the mower blade.

### Keep your lawn tools in high gear

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**S**ue Kluz knows it's time. The Canton gardener needs to clean up the yard and remove any excess growth from her garden beds if she wants them full of assorted herbs and flowers.

She'll need a few tools to get the job done, and is checking her equipment to make sure it's in tip-top shape.

"I know I'll need to check the oil in the lawn mower, the spark plug and the blade," Kluz said.

If the blade is dull, it will need to be replaced. Replacing a lawn mower blade is easy, said Harry Jachym, who writes the "Ask Dad" column for the Observer Newspapers.

"If you don't sharpen the blade, that's a good reason to change it altogether," said Jachym. (Be sure to read the owner's manual first before working on any lawn mower.)

Disconnect the spark plug wire before you begin working with the blade. Use a wrench to loosen the blade bolt and grasp the blade through a towel with your free hand.

#### Tips

Here are some tips for maintaining a clean machine:

"Spray vegetable oil under the mower and the grass will come right off," Kluz said. "It really makes cleaning it easier." Pam, cooking spray, works well, she said.

Neglecting to rinse the underside and blade can cause lawn mower problems later. Lawn clippings contain water and can cause your machine to rust, said Jachym.

Kluz's lawn arsenal includes a mower, an edger and a rechargeable trimmer.

Jachym examines Kluz's edger, which looks like it can handle many more dips along the concrete. "Don't bother sharpening the (edger's) blade," Jachym advises. "When the blade needs to be replaced, replace it."

Electrical starters on lawn units are a "good thing to think about" when purchasing a trimmer or edger, Kluz said. They make starting them a little easier.

What if your power trimmer or weedwacker runs out of cutting line? Just pop the top and restring it or

replace the reel. "I just buy the reel and pop it," Kluz said. "It's not hard to do." Jachym advises purchasing orange or yellow color line, so the line is visible when you use it.

You'll need to check the spark plug and small motor of weed trimmer units that use a gas-oil mixture. A varnish-like coat can form on these units if they're not properly maintained.

Spray inside with an engine cleaner to remove that varnish-like coat created by unused fuel that sits in the tank over the winter. Filters should be cleaned or replaced as well.

Jachym likes to replace the spark plugs on his equipment annually. "It's just a good idea," he said.

Those who are in a hurry to use their equipment can clean the spark plug with a spray that specifically is used for cleaning engines or clean it with sandpaper. Before operating, check the plug's gap, according to the manufacturer's specifications.

#### Operating the equipment

Jachym advises reading owner's manuals and follow the instructions religiously. "You should wear hearing protection, even if it's throwaway earplugs," Jachym said. "Any lawn equipment is pretty noisy."

If tools are rechargeable, charging them up once you are finished will save time later, Kluz said. "I'll plug them in when I'm done, so they'll be ready to use again," she said.

Kluz expects to purchase a shoulder harness soon to assist her with the trimmer. Kluz suffered from "golf elbows" last year after she carried her portable rechargeable trimmer a little too long one afternoon last summer.

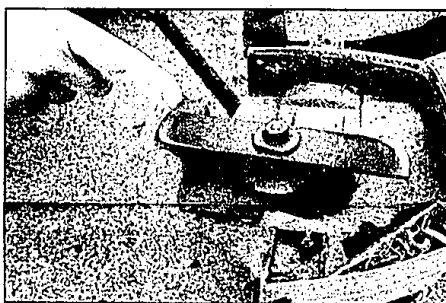
"I think that (harness) will help," Jachym said. "There's a real push on ergonomics now. I'm seeing it in the construction equipment. With the garden tools, I think you're starting to see that in there, too." For those with achy knees, knee pads also assist with any gardening clean-ups.

Jachym also recommends:

■ Checking concrete for cracks. Any growth of weeds or plant material in cracks should be killed, as these will contribute to the cracks and worsen them.

■ Using 3-in-1 oil or spray WD-40 to keep smaller tools such as garden shears clipping smoothly.

■ If you have a sprinkler system, you may need to reset the time if you've suffered any power outages, Jachym said.



On the edge: Kluz needs to check her blade on her edger before she begins the arduous task of removing that overgrown grass from her driveway and concrete patio areas.



Pop the top: If your power trimmer runs out of line, just remove the cap and reline the string, using orange or yellow line, so it is easily visible. Once the line is replaced, Kluz takes the trimmer on a short test run.



#### KEEPING IT SAFE

Whether you're clipping, cutting, mulching or mowing, chances are you're using motorized equipment or tools.

While powerful electric or gasoline motors that whirl metal blades or grind razor-sharp teeth make many household chores easier, they can also make them dangerous.

More than 70,000 people in the United States made hospital visits last year due to lawn mower mishaps; another 28,000 injuries occurred with other powered lawn/garden equipment. Additionally, 75,000 victims were treated in emergency rooms after power-law accidents.

The safety professionals at Underwriters Laboratories Inc. (UL) recommended that you follow these safety precautions for your lawnmower.

■ Before operating your mower, make sure you have read the owner's manual thoroughly, noting all safety and operating instructions. Learn the controls well enough to act instantly in an emergency and to stop the machine quickly.

■ If you have a gasoline-fueled mower, store the gas in a UL Listed safety can. Fill the mower outside, away from possible ignition sources. Before starting the mower, be sure it is on level ground and disengage all clutches.

■ Always start the mower outdoors. Never operate the mower where carbon monoxide can collect, such as in a closed garage, storage shed or basement.

■ Electrically powered lawn mowers should not be used on wet grass. Use an extension cord designed for outdoor use and rated for the power needs of your mower. To reduce the risk of cutting the cord while you're mowing, start mowing in the area nearest the electrical outlet, then move away from the outlet so the power cord will be behind you.

■ Make sure all safety guards are in place and keep the mower's blades sharp. If you do hit a foreign object or have a mower malfunction, remember to turn off the mower and disconnect the power cord before inspecting for damage.

■ Keep your hands and feet away from mower's blades. Never reach under the mower for any reason while the mower is in operation and make all adjustments with the motor off.

■ Safe footwear is important, especially with walk-behind mowers. Make sure your shoes provide good traction to reduce slipping and have sturdy soles to resist punctures. Never work barefoot or in sandals, canvas shoes, etc.

■ Never leave a lawn mower operational while unattended. Curious children, eager to help out, may get seriously injured.

Source: Underwriters Laboratories, Inc. For more safety tips for lawn and garden tools, look inside today's At Home Section.

#### MARTY FIGLEY

##### Late bloomers

Her Garden Spot column reviews why your plants may not be blooming yet.

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#### JOE GAGNON

##### Defective tubes

Consumers are still shocked by effects of defective dip tubes in their hot water tanks.

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#### HOMETOWN LIFE:

##### Spring planting:

Children from the St. Vincent & Sarah Fisher Center planted flowers for the upcoming Garden Party.

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