

HOME WORK

Maintain your lawn equipment by following these tips

ASK
DAD

HARRY JACHYM

grow. We use the equipment we prepared in the spring to cut and trim our yards, and don't think about them until the next time they're needed.

This complacency can lead to premature wear of the tools and make them harder to use. A power tool that runs well is easier and safer to use and produces less pollution.

Inspect equipment

Take a moment to visually inspect the equipment before each use. The vibrations of small engines can easily loosen the most secure fastener. Debris in the cooling fins reduces the unit's efficiency and can contribute to overheating of the engine, which can shorten its life.

Even though it's a simple matter of unscrewing one cap, we often don't bother to check the oil. Small engines can be notorious oil burners, especially with age. Add oil as necessary, but don't overfill. If you haven't changed the oil lately, do it now. Spray cables occasionally with penetrating lubricants, such as WD-40.

Just as a sharp knife is easier to use than a dull one, a sharp mower blade reduces the amount of work needed from the engine to turn it. This in turn

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reduces fuel consumption and places less wear on the engine.

Grass clippings that compress on the underside of the mower (especially true of mulchers) also create drag on the engine and hasten deterioration of the deck. Rinse the deck after each use and avoid cutting the lawn when it's wet. My wife's friend sprays cooking oil on the underside of her lawnmower deck to help prevent this buildup. Be certain to

disconnect the spark plug wire before working under the lawnmower deck.

Check filters

Engines need air to burn fuel. A dirty air filter reduces the amount of air available so fuel is burned with less efficiency.

Depending on the type (consult the owner's manual), the filter needs to be replaced or cleaned often especially in dry, dusty conditions.

Anything you do to keep your power equipment running better also will help reduce pollution it creates.

Pollution controls on small engines can be difficult for the manufacturers since the cost of the control equipment often exceeds the cost of the engine.

Use common sense when operating equipment. Because of summer's heat we may want to do our lawn work dressed like Jimmy Buffett. Sandals and

shorts don't mix with power equipment. Wear eye protection, especially when using string trimmers and edgers.

And a final word of advice from an old shop teacher who asks "what?" a lot, use hearing

protection.

Harry Jachym, a licensed builder, lives in Plymouth and teaches building trades to high school students.

Keep an eye on your summer electric bills

As energy rates soar, everyone needs affordable ways to beat the heat.

With hot weather already upon us, now is the time to give your home a "check-up." Here are six tips from the Comfort Institute to make sure your summer electric bills don't blow your cool.

Don't run your clothes dryer when it's hot. Your dryer blows air out of your house when it's drying clothes. And for every cubic foot of air it blows out, a cubic foot of hot outside air gets sucked in that your air conditioner has to cool down. Run your dryer late at night or early

morning and you'll have lower electric bills. Even better, use a "solar powered" clothes dryer: a clothes line in the back yard.

Have your duct system tested for air leaks. Many think that windows and doors are the major cause of a home's energy wasting air leaks. But according to recent research by the Department of Energy, gaps, joints and disconnections in the typical home's duct system are much more significant. The DOE states that the typical duct system loses 25 percent to 40 percent of the energy put out by the central heat pump or air conditioner.

Leaks are usually the biggest problem. Authorities recommend having a contractor seal them with bushings on "mastic." Duct tape often dries out and fails. (It turns out duct tape is great for many things, but sealing ducts isn't one of them!)

Ask your air conditioning contractor to perform an Infiltrometer "blower door" test. The blower door is a computerized instrument originally invented by the Department of Energy. It pinpoints where your home's worst air leaks are, such as duct leaks, and also measures how leaky the overall house is. While most homes are still far too leaky,

some are now quite tight, and need mechanical ventilation to ensure the air inside is fresh. Many contractors offer an Infiltrometer test as part of a "Whole House Comfort Checkup" that also checks insulation levels and overall duct performance.

For more information, visit the website www.comfortinstitute.org.

Regulate your air conditioning or heat pump air filter. Most systems need this done every month to ensure safe and efficient operation. Some such as electronic air cleaners need to be thoroughly washed.

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