

Winter Priorities: A Course of Action

DEREK WALDER • TECHNICAL EDITOR • INSTITUTE OF GROUNDSMANSHIP PANEL OF SPECIALISTS



Question to the Expert: What should our priorities be during the winter months when there is not a lot to do on the ground? Can you advise on a course of action?

— D.E. of Essex

Answer

All machinery and equipment should be kept in a good state of readiness, so that if required it can be used immediately. Essential to achieving this is that all machinery and equipment is maintained at all times. During the winter months however, some machinery is used very little or not at all and this gives the time to carry out such duties that may have been difficult during the busy season.

Fertilizer Distributors

- Ensure that the hopper and all moving parts are thoroughly cleaned and where necessary oiled or lubricated. Ensure that no trace of fertilizers has been overlooked as this will cause rapid corrosion.

- Check the calibration of the distributor before spring.

- Any spare parts required should be ordered. If there is not a manufacturer's handbook, now is the time to contact the supplier and ask for one.

Grass Cutting Equipment

- If your grass cutting equipment requires an overhaul get in contact with your regular service company. Make a list yourself of what is required and give it to them. Always ask for an estimate before work commences so there are no 'shocks' when the machinery and the invoice come back.

- Check the machinery is in a reasonable state of repair, with attention being given to the cutting cylinders, bedknives and rotary knives, and belts and chains.

- If you have experienced any problems during the season with the engine then this should be corrected and your service company advised.

- If your machinery does not have to go away then ensure that all cylinders are loosened off the bedknife and oiled or sprayed with WD-40®. Disconnect the

spark plug from the engine and replace with a new one before next season.

- Check back on your requirements for spares during the last season and if the budget allows order basic spares such as drive belts or chains, spark plugs, cables and any nuts and bolts that proved to be troublesome. It is better to have a small stock of essential items ready at hand, this alleviates the 'down time' during the busy season.

- For storage purposes during the winter months try and store all machinery off the ground and on wooden slats or pallets.

Turf Cultivation Equipment

- Spiking machines which are used throughout the winter period when weather conditions are suitable should always be kept in working order. Worn or damaged tines should be replaced and again a small stock of spare tines should be available.

- Scarifiers should receive the same treatment as grass cutting equipment with the added check of tines, whether steel or spring tines. As with the other machinery, spare tines should be available and changed if broken or worn.

- On all machinery with engines, empty the fuel from the tanks when storing, remove batteries and ensure they are kept fully charged. Always ensure that the top of the plates are not exposed.

- Pneumatic tires are best slightly deflated and any machines with springs on them should be stored with the load taken off the springs. 'V'-belts are best removed and stored in a cool dark place.

- Any overseeding equipment should be checked thoroughly as this is going to be one of the first machines to be used in the spring. Many of these machines have rub-

ber belts or rollers and these should be checked to ensure they are not perished or split. Those machines that have nylon disks or rollers should also be checked for chips or splits.

Tractors

- It should be best practice that tractors and any other vehicles are checked daily, weekly and monthly, according to the manufacturer's handbook, however when there is more time available then some of the more mundane tasks such as cleaning down the engines with an appropriate engine cleaner and checking nuts and bolts can be carried out.

- Remember that you rely on your machinery to get your job done and to make life easier for you so ensure that it is always maintained well and that basic 'spares' are kept in stock.

Theft

- While on the subject of machinery, it is a wise move to list all of your machinery details: make, name, colour, serial number, engine number and any other details from the manufacturers' plates on the machines.

- In the case of theft, and this is a growing problem, especially in unattended buildings in isolated areas, these details will be invaluable to the police and insurance companies.

- The winter months are especially vulnerable and the thieves' best friend, when it is dark and most of us finish work earlier than in the summer months. ♦

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