

# STARTING MOWERS AND STORING SNOWTHROWERS

It's time to put away your snowthrowers and get your mowers ready. A couple hours of work now will make sure each is ready when you are.

**T**here's nothing more frustrating than wasting a sunny spring day to start an unresponsive lawn mower for the first cutting of the season... unless it's bundling up on the first morning of the first big snow and not being able to start your snowthrower.

Early spring is the perfect time to circumvent both problems. Prepare your mowers for use on the same spring day you prep your snowthrowers for storage, and you'll en-

sure easy-starting equipment.

The most important consideration is fresh gasoline. "The number one problem recognized by outdoor power equipment service centers is gas left in machines during long periods of non-use, or old gas (gas left in a can for more than a season) used to fill the machine at the beginning of a new season," says Bert Thompson, Pro-Line marketing manager for the Toro Company.

"Because gas becomes stale and

breaks down after a period of time, it can gum up and literally shellac the inside of a carburetor. Therefore, you should empty the gas tank at the end of the season, and fill the machine with fresh gas at the beginning of a season.

## **At the beginning**

Before performing mechanical maintenance on any equipment, avoid accidentally starting the engine by detaching the spark plug high tension



To completely drain your snowthrower of gas, first empty the fuel tank according to the instructions in your operator's manual. Then, start the engine and let it run until it stops.

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wire.

If you have let your mower sit since the last time it was used way back last fall, you'll need to start with a thorough cleaning. Tip the machine on its side and remove any dirt or grass clippings by spraying the housing with a garden hose. Scrape out any grass that water will not remove with a wooden scraper. Touch up areas on the top and underside of the deck with paint to prevent rust or corrosion from forming.

This is also a good time to check the blade fastener and blade for general

After making sure the crankcase has been completely drained, refill it with the recommended oil to the proper level. Take care not to overfill the crankcase as engine damage or starting difficulty may result.

Also, lubricate and grease other mower parts as recommended in the operator's manual. Replenish battery liquid in batteries that need fluid, and charge for the specified charging time before using.

Finally, refill a completely empty gas tank with fresh gas for the season.

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*If you have let your mowers sit since the last time you used them, you'll need to start by thoroughly cleaning them. Tip the machine on it's side and remove any dirt or grass clippings by spraying the housing with a garden hose. Scrape out any grass that the water will not remove with a wooden scraper.*

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condition and sharpness. If the blade needs servicing, follow the blade maintenance procedure in the operator's manual, making sure the blade is balanced before re-installing and is properly tightened according to the manufacturer's specifications. Rotary lawn mower blades should always be sharpened only on one side, generally on the upper surface.

With the machine right-side-up, use a rag and appropriate cleaning solvent to clean dirt, grime and grass clippings from the external parts of the engine, shrouding and engine housing. Special attention should be given to the cylinder head fins and blower housing to make sure they are completely clean for proper air cooling.

Also service the spark plug. With the cylinder head clean to ensure that foreign matter does not fall into the cylinder, remove the spark plug and check for proper gap, replacing it if necessary with one recommended by the manufacturer.

Although it should be cleaned throughout the season, the air cleaner on a mower, rider, or tractor becomes dirty by the fall. Wash foam-type air cleaner elements in a solution of liquid soap detergent and warm water. After drying and saturating it with oil, squeeze excess oil out of the element and reassemble. Simply replace paper-type filters.

Check and tighten all nuts, bolts, and screws that may have been loosened from vibration. If any part is damaged, repair or replace it.

## The snowthrower

The most important step for prepping outdoor power equipment for storage is to empty the gas tank. To completely drain your snowthrower of gas, first empty the fuel tank according to the instructions in your operator's manual. Then, start the engine and let it run until it stops.

All snowthrowers are by nature shaken around a lot. Thompson recommends inspecting for loose drive coupling and other parts which can later cause expensive problems.

Thompson says you should lubricate the control linkage and other moving parts of the snowthrower before storage. The crankcase oil should be changed prior to each season, using winter-weight oil (10W, 10W30, or 5W20). Run the engine just before changing the oil because warm oil flows better and carries away more contaminants than cold oil.

You'll want to remove the battery before long periods of storage. Finally, Toro suggests covering the snowthrowers to protect them from dust and dirt and storing them in a clean, dry place.

"Your outdoor power equipment sits idle a majority of the time," says Thompson. "But when it's needed, you need to be able to depend on its immediate performance. That's why, in addition to regular maintenance, your best bet for preventing problems is to buy a quality product from a reputable dealer. A little care combined with a well-built machine will give you years of satisfying performance."