



November Tips

TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT

by Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture

- To winterize your mower, first disconnect the spark plug wire. Drain out all the gasoline and oil, and replace the old oil with fresh oil. (Take the old oil to a recycling center.) Clean out grass from underneath the mower. Spray paint under the clean deck to prevent rust in the future. Remove and clean the air filter or replace paper filters. Inspect wheels, and replace excessively worn wheels to ensure a level cut next spring. Remove blades, and sharpen them before storing.
- Remember to pull the spark plug before storing your lawn mower for the winter. Check for carbon build-up, and replace if needed.
- Keep your shears and loppers in good working order. Wipe them with a rag dipped in paint thinner to remove sticky resins. Sharpen and oil thoroughly.
- Just like your home, car, and tools, lawns and gardens need maintenance. Investing a few dollars now in a soil test can save you money next year. Call your Extension agent for details.
- To clean garden tools, put warm water and a tablespoon of dishwasher detergent into a bucket. The detergent helps detach soil clumps from metal blades. When clean and dry, use a broad file to sharpen shovels and hoes for next season.
- Tools sharpened on a power grinder heat up and lose their tempering, making the metal prone to breaking. To make your tools last longer, get a broad file and learn the age-old art of blade sharpening this winter.
- Outdoor water pipes, faucets, and hoses should be drained before cold weather occurs to prevent damage by freezing.
- In preparation for storage, hoses and sprinklers should be drained and lubricated. Replace washers where needed.
- Rubber gloves don't absorb moisture, so for chores involving wet materials, they will keep your hands warmer than cloth gloves.
- Drive support poles for burlap snow screens into the ground before it freezes.
- Be sure to thoroughly clean sprayers and dusters before putting them away for the winter. Clean garden tools, and apply a coating of rustproof grease.
- Treat your lawn mower right this winter, and it will treat you right next spring. Run the gas out of the tank, remove the spark plug, and squirt a tablespoon of oil into the

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cylinder head. Give the engine a tum or two to coat the cylinder walls with oil, and then replace the plug. Disconnect the spark plug wire, and clean any accumulated grass from under the mower. Then store it in a dry place until spring. Consider having the blades sharpened now so you won't have to put off mowing in the spring because the blades are in the shop being sharpened.

- Clean power tools of all plant material and dirt. Replace worn spark plugs, oil all necessary parts, and sharpen blades. Store all tools in their proper place indoors, never outdoors where they will rust over the winter.
- Clean, oil, and mend all hand tools. Repaint handles or identification marks that have faded over the summer. Sharpen all blades and remove any rust.
- Protect concrete pools by covering them or by floating logs in the water. Drain the water before freezing weather. A few boards or logs on the pool bottom will keep the freezing expansion of any water that might accumulate from damaging the pool.
- Before storing your stakes and trellises, be sure they are thoroughly cleaned of remnants of plant materials and dirt. Hose down all particularly dirty places. Put stakes in bundles, and stack them so they won't get lost over the winter. Roll up trellises, and tie them securely.
- Rinse pesticide spray equipment after each use and before winter storage. Add water and several drops of detergent to fill the spray tank 1/10th full. Shake the tank, and spray the water over the area where the chemical was just applied. Caution: rinsing will not remove herbicides from sprayers. A separate sprayer **MUST** be used to apply herbicides to prevent the residue from killing plants when pesticides or other chemicals are applied.
- As soon as seed flats are emptied of fall transplants, wash and sterilize them before storage so they are ready when you need them in spring.

Monthly Tips have been prepared since 1986 by various staff of the Office of Consumer Horticulture including Ellen Bennett, Michelle Buckstrup, Susan Day, Susan DeBolt, Sharon Dendy, Kate Dobbs, Sheri Dom, David Gravell, Virginia Nathan, Jenny Shuster, Ellen Silva, and Ruth Sorenson. Resource material for the development of this information includes the Virginia Master Gardener Handbook; Extension Publications and newsletters from VCE, numerous other states, and the USDA; and an extensive library of over 900 books, magazines and journals. Project funded by The Virginia Gardener Newsletter subscription fees. Diane Relf, Project Director and Content Specialist.

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