



Lawn Mower Tune-up

by Bruce Peverley, OSU Extension Agriculture Educator

Tune-up your mower before the lawn mowing season. A mower tune-up will extend your mower's life and will reduce polluting emissions by up to 50%.

With a small gas engine mower, the tune up is a basic four step process. **Step one** is to clean or replace the air filter on the engine.

Step two is change the oil. Oil should be changed at least once per season or every twenty-five hours of use. Make sure you use the proper oil for your engine. If you are unsure, check with a dealer who handles your brand of mower engine. Many riding gas mowers featuring larger engines will also have an oil filter. If you have a filter on your engine, replace it when you change the oil.

Step three, changing the engine spark plug, or in some cases plugs, will help ensure faster starting of your engine. It is recommended to change plugs at the start of every mowing season.

Step four is the changing of the fuel filter. Stale fuel makes it more difficult for the mower to start.

Keep lawn mower gas as fresh as possible. Using a fuel stabilizer can help you avoid a stale fuel problem.

On larger mowers, check your belts, blades and deck parts. Replace worn belts or belts over four years in age. Make sure blades have no play in their attachment. If you have the deck off your mower, remove blades and sharpen.

With mowers that have inflatable tires, make sure all tires have the proper air pressure. Low tire pressure can affect the quality of cut your mower gives.

A mower tune-up will save you money, protect your mower investment and will help ensure you can mow whenever the job is needed.

5 Tips for Cleaning Outdoor Furniture

by Charlotte Richert, OSU Extension Family & Consumer Sciences Educator

Almost half of those who answered a recent Consumer Reports Poll said they would be spending more time in their outdoor spaces this year. Although entertaining and personal enjoyment are high on their list of activities, spending time and money aren't. Save some cash by making your outdoor furniture look as great as the lawn and garden. Use environmentally safe cleaners. Common household items are best. These include soda, vinegar, and borax soap.

To clean the patio, it is recommended that you use a pressure washer to remove all the dirt and grime that settles.

Use vinegar for your wooden decks and patio furniture. Vinegar is the least abrasive, and easy to use. It even removes mildew. For the tough to get areas, use a small brush, then rinse and let the furniture dry.

To clean lawn cushions use liquid detergent and a sponge. Use the same substance to clean the umbrella table as well. You may mix with vinegar too. Put it in a spray bottle for window washing. It may be poured directly on the gummy surfaces too.

If there are areas on your furniture which need more cleaning us this recipe: 1 t borax, ½ t soda, 1 T vinegar and ½ t liquid soap and 2 cups very hot water. Combine the borax, soda, vinegar and liquid soap in a spray bottle. Add very hot water, shake and let the minerals dissolve. Spray onto the area to be cleaned and wipe off with a sponge or cloth. To make a larger recipe in a bucket use 1/8 cup borax, 1/8 cup soda, 1 T liquid soap, ½ cup vinegar and 2 gallons hot water. It is also recommended to use rubber gloves.

Glass cleaner: ¼ to ½ t liquid soap, 3 T vinegar, 2 cups water, spray bottle. Shake these ingredients together and keep on-hand for glass-top patio tables and windows.

Lunch Hour Rainbow Flower Garden on a Budget

by Sue Gray, OSU Extension Horticulture Educator

Beautiful cut flowers are within your grasp for just a few dollars. One of the best flower gardens I ever grew was when I had little or no extra money to spend. I found seeds on sale for 10 cents a packet and grew five kinds of annual flowers.

At our workplace was a bare area that I was allowed to plant. When we sat outside to eat our lunches everyone enjoyed the flowers. During my lunch hour I was able to tend the garden.

Our staff enjoyed cutting bouquets to take home or to decorate the workplace.

Finding low cost seed is not hard. Local hardware stores have various ranges of prices for seed. Some put them on special sales in the spring for just a few cents.

This “rainbow” garden of colors was planted in five rows with tallest plants at the back. They were all easy to start from seed sown in the ground in late April to early May.

Here’s what we found that works best in the Tulsa area:

Back row: Sunflowers Colors: Yellow and brown. Height: 7 feet

Fourth row: Cosmos Colors: Pink and White. Height: 4 to 5 feet

Third row: Tall Mixed Zinnias Colors: Pink, Red, Purple, Yellow and White. Height: 2 to 3 feet

Second row: Marigolds Colors: Yellow and Orange. **OR:** Bachelor Buttons: Blue. Height: 2 feet.

First row: Dwarf/Thumbelina zinnias, mixed colors of pink, yellow, red and white. Height: 12 inches
OR: Moss Rose. Colors: Deep pink, orange, white and yellow. Height: 6 inches.

To prepare the site, which was about twenty feet wide by ten feet deep, we roto-tilled the soil, scratched in some fertilizer: about 2 lbs of 10-20-10 fertilizer, or about 1 sack of manure.

Then, we raked the ground very smooth, used a hoe blade to make five furrows in an arc or semi-circle shape, and then sowed the seed.

We thinned the plants to correct planting distance as seedlings came up, kept the garden mulched and enjoyed harvesting cut flowers in mid to late summer. The plants were planted so thickly that weeds were not a problem. Mulch could be added for weed control and soaker hoses could be used for watering.

Even vegetable gardens grow better with flowers sprinkled among the plants. Flowers attract pollinating insects that also pollinate the vegetable flowers, resulting in bigger yields. Flowers also attract beneficial insects that help keep insect pests in balance.

Grow a few rows of garden flowers this summer and invite co-workers and/or neighbors to enjoy them, too. A sign saying: “Please pick the flowers” is much more friendly than “No Trespassing” and may just create a healthier community where you work or live.