



## Store power tools properly to ensure a good start to spring gardening

While some gardeners already have stored the hedge trimmers and lawnmower, it's a sure bet most of them are still using their chainsaws following the ice storm a few weeks ago. But once the limbs are trimmed and stacked on the curb, it will be time to put all of the power tools to rest for the winter.

When we start seeing more daylight in the late winter, gardeners will be ready to get back into the landscape once again. Properly storing those power tools will help ensure gardeners get off on the right foot when gardening season begins next year.

Before storing tools for the winter, it's a good idea to change the oil and filter. To help make sure all the oil drains, run the piece of equipment for a few minutes to warm it up. You'll get better flow that way. It also helps remove any dirt that is suspended in the oil. Be sure to replace the oil filter if the piece of equipment has one. Check the owner's manual to ensure you use the recommended amount, quality and viscosity of oil.

Don't forget about the spark plugs. Replace if they're worn or burned. Also, gap the plugs based on manufacturers' recommendations using a gap tool. Be careful not to over-tighten when replacing the plug. Using a torque wrench and correct torque to reinstall the plug will help avoid the possibility of stripping the threads in the engine block.

Everyone is familiar with spring cleaning. Keeping your gardening tools clean is just as important as keeping your home clean. Most small engines are air-cooled and have cooling fins on the engine block. Keeping those fins clean will help prevent overheating the engine. Be sure to check the air and fuel filters and replace as necessary.

It's a good idea to drain gasoline from equipment. Over time, the gas will evaporate and leave a buildup in the carburetor. This buildup will make the engine more difficult, or impossible, to start next spring. The easiest way to empty the tank is to simply run the engine dry. The tank is then ready for fresh gas next year.

Another option is to fill the tank with fresh gas that has a gasoline stabilizer added to it. You must use fresh gas as the stabilizer only stops deterioration; it can't reverse it. Mix the stabilizer with a gallon or more of fresh gas rather than trying to figure out how much to add to a small tank. Storing an engine with stabilized gasoline in the tank will prevent the problem of seals drying out.

Your gardening activities will go a lot smoother in the spring if you take the time to properly store your equipment this fall.

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