

**Friday's Feature**

**By**

**Theresa Friday**

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### **Don't store the lawn mower just yet**

The cold weather has finally slowed or stopped the growth of our turfgrasses. But before you put up the mower, think about removing the leaves that might be covering your lawn. While leaves can become excellent mulch or compost, they should not be left intact on your lawn.

Leaves lying on the turf canopy reduce light and air circulation necessary for healthy turf. A layer of leaves covering the lawn means that damage from diseases and insects can easily go unnoticed until the turf is totally destroyed.

A blanket of leaves covering the turf will trap moisture between the soil and the leaves providing an ideal environment for the proliferation of diseases. Therefore, leaves should be periodically raked from the lawn or at least mulched down into the thatch with a good mulching mower.



Leaves left on turfgrass can mask problems.

*Photo credit: Theresa Friday*

And once you have your leaves removed, think about performing some preventative maintenance on your mower. Following are a few easy steps that will have your mower ready to go when the grass starts growing next spring.

- Fuel only has a shelf life of about 30 days before it begins to break down. If near the end of a tank of gasoline, run the mower till it stalls. If you have a full tank, add some gasoline stabilizer and run the

mower for a couple of minutes to distribute it throughout the engine.

- Drain and replace the engine oil since dirt and other contaminants can settle and build up on the engine.
- Remove the spark plug. Add a teaspoon of oil to the hole and replace the plug (but don't connect the wire). Crank or turn the engine by giving the cord a couple of pulls to distribute the oil. This will protect the engine from corrosion.
- Clean the air filter. Foam air filters should be cleaned with warm soapy water or other appropriate solvent. Before replacing the filter, pour a couple tablespoons of clean engine oil on the filter and squeeze to distribute. Paper filters can be shaken or blown clean or just replaced with a new one.
- Tighten fasteners and screws, bolts and nuts as needed.
- Give the entire mower a good cleaning. Clean off all debris and remove grass clippings from the engine area and the underside.
- If you have a battery, remove and clean. Charge if necessary and store in a cool, dry place where it won't freeze.
- If your mower is scratched or roughed up, paint these areas to prevent rust and corrosion.
- Lubricate as necessary per the operator's manual.
- Store the mower in a dry place or cover the unit to protect it from the elements. Note: Never store the mower in the house (living area) or basement where ignition sources may be present such as hot water and space heaters, clothes dryers and the like because gasoline and fumes are highly flammable, explosive and dangerous if inhaled.

If you have equipment that has seen better days and you doubt that it will make it through another season now is a great time to purchase new equipment. Many dealers have some great bargains available.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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