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## Simple Tips to Make Lawn Mower Maintenance a Breeze

By Jeff Zornes

There are several simple maintenance tips you can do to extend the life of your equipment. They are as followed:

### Air Filters



Something often overlooked is a clogged air filter. A clogged filter can reduce the power of a mower and also lower its fuel economy. With heavy equipment use, two filter changes a year will make a significant difference over the lifetime of the machine.

### Spark Plugs



Many people never even think of changing the spark plugs if the machine is working properly. The truth is, spark plugs wear out over time under normal operating conditions. Changing the spark plug can bring a mower back to life and eliminate countless extra pulls to start the machine. Even if a mower is

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running fine, changing the spark plug once a year is a great way to keep it running smoothly all year round.

### Oil Changes



Oil is the blood of your mower; mowers need to have their oil changed throughout the year to remove particulate contamination caused by wear and tear. The frequency of oil changes is dependant on how often and how long the mower runs. The longer and harder the machine is worked, the more frequent the oil will need to be changed. For home use, an oil change in the spring and fall should be plenty to keep things properly lubricated.

### Blades



Sharp blades are one of the most important aspects of a mower. A sharp blade cuts the grass evenly and with minimal effort. A dull blade actually rips the grass and can cause an uneven cut. To insure the mower provides the best cut, change the blades or have the blades sharpened at a local lawnmower service shop every other month.

## PRUNING MATURE TREES “PRUNING TECHNIQUES”, PART 2

By Gary McCunn, Certified Arborist WE-7255A



Specific types of pruning may be necessary to maintain a mature tree in a healthy, safe, and attractive condition.

**Cleaning:** is the removal of dead, dying, diseased, crowded, weakly attached and low-vigor branches from the crown of a tree.

**Thinning:** is the selective removal of branches to increase light penetration and air movement through the crown. Thinning opens the foliage of a tree, reduces weight on heavy limbs, and helps retain the tree's natural shape.

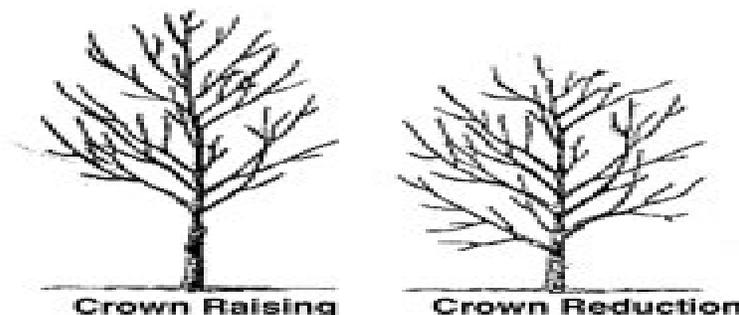
**Raising:** removes the lower branches from a tree in order to provide clearance for buildings, vehicles, pedestrians, and vistas.

**Reduction:** reduces the size of a tree, often for clearance for utility lines. Reducing the height or spread of a tree is best accomplished by pruning back the leaders and branch terminals to lateral branches

that are large enough to assume the terminal roles (at least one-third the diameter of the cut stem). Compared to topping, reduction helps maintain the form and structural integrity of the tree.

### How Much Should Be Pruned?

The amount of live tissue that should be removed depends on the tree size, species, and age, as well as the pruning objectives. Younger trees tolerate the removal of a higher percentage of living tissue better than mature trees do. An important principle to remember is that a tree can recover from several small pruning wounds faster than from one large wound. A common mistake is to remove too much inner foliage and small branches. It is important to maintain an even distribution of foliage along large limbs and in the lower portion of the crown. Overthinning reduces the tree's sugar production capacity and can create tip-heavy limbs that are prone to failure.



## Caring for Winter Rye Lawns

During the month of November your winter rye should be established and is thick, lush and green. In order to keep this look throughout the winter and spring months there are two items that need to be watched. These two items are watering and fertilizing.

Make sure to keep a close eye on watering your winter rye by using a probe of some sort. (soil probe, metal rod or a screw driver) One of the most common problems with yellowing rye grass is overwatering. With the cooler weather you do not need to water your rye grass daily like the summer Bermuda. You should only be watering rye around two to three times a week. Make sure to check the soil moisture to help come up with how long your run times should be.

If rain occurs then you have a great opportunity to turn your water off. The amount of rain is your factor on how long you can leave your water off.

Rye grass needs fertilizer monthly during the winter months to keep it looking good. For best results, use a fertilizer with a nutrient content in a ratio of 3-1-2. This ratio relates to a number found on the fertilizer bag label and indicates the amount of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium found in the fertilizer.

Rye grass is very sensitive to frost damage. This time of year there is often frost on your turf until mid morning. Foot traffic on rye that has frost will damage the blades of grass and it may not grow back.



### MONTHLY LANDSCAPE CHECKLIST

#### Plant Renovation List (Common Type Plants)

- √ Red Bird of Paradise
- √ Desert Willow
- √ Bat-Faced Cuphea
- √ Rose Mallow
- √ Juniper
- √ Indian Hawthorn

– General Irrigation Setting (Actual times will vary depending on the precipitation rate of your system)

- √ Bermuda Grass Turf (if you are not overseeding) irrigated using typical pop-up sprinklers: 6 – 8 minutes one time per week. Bermuda will begin going dormant towards the

middle to end of the month depending on weather.

- √ Drip irrigation for Plants: 20 minutes one time per week. These times are for ornamental type plants. Native or xeriscape plants will require less.

Drip irrigation for Trees: 25 minutes one

- √ time per week. These times are for ornamental type trees. Native or xeriscape trees will require less.

Please remember that these are general recommendations and depending on your system you may need to adjust watering times up or down. Also, if we do receive rain then irrigation can be suspended until the soil dries.