

Keep Your Lawn Mower At Work After Summer Months

(Family Features) Every year cooler temperatures signal a new round of seasonal chores, like swapping screens for storm doors, cleaning and storing patio furniture, and checking for air leaks around the home. Many Americans also use this time to prepare lawn equipment for winter storage, but experts at John Deere say, "Not so fast." Riding lawn attachments, have revolutionized the way homeowners approach fall and winter yard work so now you can do more than just mow.

Fertilizing

Late fall is one of the best times to fertilize a lawn. One final dose of fertilizer before the cold weather strikes is good for strengthening roots and increasing the nitrogen stored for an earlier spring green; while the top growth of the grass stops, all energy is reserved for the following season. The specific time of day you fertilize depends on the current weather conditions, and fertilizer should not be applied if rain is in the immediate 24-hour forecast.

Instead of pacing the yard with a cart or hand-held bucket, John Deere suggests attaching a tow behind spreader to a lawn mower or garden tractor to

quickly spread fertilizer, seed and even ice melting products when the snowfall arrives.

Aerating

Aerating is ideal in cooler months for removing plugs of soil and thatch from a lawn. It encourages deep rooting, improves water and nutrient penetration, helps break down thatch and promotes growth of beneficial soil microorganisms.

In place of spiked shoes or spray-on liquids, options include plug aerators, spike aerators and thatchers that easily attach behind a tractor and removes plugs of soil from two to three-inches deep.

Mulching

If you prefer not to rake or bag grass or leaves, mulching is an ideal alternative. Be sure to mulch leaves only when they are dry since mulching wet or damp leaves can cause build up or make your engine work harder and use more fuel. Remember that grass needs sunlight in the fall to help store food for winter, so be careful when mulching this time of year. A thin layer of mulched leaves will do and helps add nutrients to



the soil, reducing the need for fertilizer.

Composting

Creating a compost pile allows you to

take advantage of decomposed organic material to create a rich soil. The fall season is a good time to create a compost pile with decaying matter through-

out the yard, like vegetables, grass clippings and leaves, which contain the nutrients necessary to add nitrogen the soil needs for planting come spring. Be sure to alternate layers of "brown material," or high carbon materials, with your grass clippings.

Using a rear bagger with your lawn mower or tractor will help make collecting grass clippings a breeze. You can also collect materials with a blade or shovel to easily and efficiently create your compost pile. When winter strikes, you can use these attachments to plow, pick up and transport snow.

If you prefer to store your lawn equipment this winter, be sure to do it properly. John Deere recommends tightening all nuts and bolts, checking belts, filters and safety shields, changing the oil, sharpening the blade, and adding a fuel stabilizer to help protect against clogs in the carburetor from old fuel (note: after adding the stabilizer, run the engine for five minutes).

For more information, lawn care tips and to find a variety of mower and tractor attachments, visit www.johndeere.com/homeowners and www.readytomow.com.

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Create an Outdoor Living Space That Will Get Used

Many homeowners think an outdoor living space is one that can only be used during the warm-weather months. However, if done right, individuals can enjoy outdoor rooms for much of the year.

Creating a comfortable, intimate and private outdoor space offers a spot to which a person can retire after a long day — especially a person who enjoys the delights of Mother Nature. Outdoor rooms can be customized depending on the space one has, meaning

homeowners or renters with any size yard or patio area can enjoy an outdoor room.

Starting the project first requires determining where the outdoor space will be situated. Most people prefer to keep it close to the house for easy access. It's also important to consider how many seasons will be enjoyed outdoors. This will determine the accessories needed. For example, those who want to stretch outdoor living into the late autumn may want to invest in a chiminea or outdoor fire-

place to provide a focal point and warm place to converge when the weather is brisk. Those who only desire a summer area may want an arbor or pergola to keep the area cooler when the sun is scorching.

Keep in mind that this area of the outdoors should be private; otherwise it probably won't be used much. Plants, trellis, garden structures, and other elements can help to keep the area blocked off from prying eyes. Bamboo is a fast-growing grass that will make an effective privacy screen.

Next, consider plants that provide aesthetic appeal. If the outdoor room will be used for three seasons, use a variety of plants that will ensure blooms all year long. Consider plants that will feed wildlife and attract butterflies and birds. Greenery tends to create a relaxing space. Don't forget a few evergreen shrubs or trees if the space will be enjoyed past the summer.

Think about comfortable furniture to add to the space. Stores sell so many different varieties of outdoor furniture, from traditional patio sets to chaises and sofas that rival ones that would normally be found indoors. Accessorize as one would inside, adding side tables, throw pillows (in weather-resistant fabrics) and ottomans. The goal is comfort and convenience.

Don't forget lighting. While there's bound to be plenty of sunlight during the day, individuals who want to sit outdoors at night should think about wired or solar lighting. Candles or a fire in a fire pit also can provide ample illumination.

Homeowners going above and beyond can shield the outdoor room from the elements even further by building a screened-in outdoor space. This will help keep bugs at bay and provide shelter if it rains. Use curtains or shutters to give the area a cozy appeal.

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