Preparing Your Lawn And Garden Equipment for Spring:

Tips From The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute

(NAPS)—Spring is on its way and soon, home and business owners will be cleaning and preparing lawn and garden equipment.

“Many are so eager to pull out lawn and garden equipment once spring arrives that they sometimes forget basic steps to ensure the powerhouse of the equipment—the engine—is in good working order,” said Kris Kiser, president and CEO of OPEI.

“One challenge is that most fuel contains some level of ethanol, which contains corrosive alcohol. If you left that fuel in the tank over the winter months, you don’t want to use it in the spring. It may damage your equipment. You need to drain it and put in new fuel that is E10 or lower,” advises Kiser.

Whether it’s a mower, trimmer, blower, chain saw or pruner, the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) offers tips to help users avoid fuel-related problems and ready their equipment to operate safely.

Check the fuel tank. If fuel has been sitting all winter long in the fuel tank, do not use it in the spring. Drain it responsibly and put in fresh fuel. Remember to dispose of this fuel properly.

Use only E10 or lower fuel in your outdoor power equipment. Do not use gas with more than 10 percent ethanol (E10) in outdoor power equipment. Some gas stations may offer 15 percent ethanol (E15) gas or other fuel blends, but this higher ethanol fuel is dangerous and in fact illegal to use in any small engine equipment, such as lawn mowers, chain saws, generators, and all other lawn and garden equipment.

Don’t leave fuel sitting in the tank for more than 30 days. Untreated gasoline (without a fuel stabilizer) left in the system will deteriorate, which may cause starting or running problems and, in some cases, damage to the fuel system.

Inspect your equipment. Check for loose belts and missing or damaged parts. If you find anything concerning, replace the parts or take your equipment to a qualified service representative.

Drain out the old oil and put in fresh oil. Remove the oil drain plug in your lawn mower and catch the old oil in a container. Replace the plug and refill the engine with oil recommended by the product manufacturer.

Properly dispose of the oil you drained.

Install clean air filters. Your engine and equipment will run much better with clean filters. Paper filters need to be replaced. Some foam filters can be cleaned and replaced.

Sharpen your cutting blade. Have your lawn mower’s cutting blade sharpened so you can get a clean cut on your lawn. Your lawn will be healthier and your lawn mower will operate more efficiently, too.

Clean your equipment. If you did not clean your equipment before storing it, there may be dirt, oil or grass stuck to it. Give your equipment a good spring-cleaning. A cleaner machine will run more efficiently and last longer.

Review your manual. Now is a good time to read the operator’s manual and familiarize yourself with the controls and what they do. Make sure you know how to stop the machine quickly if needed.

About OPEI

The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute is an international trade association representing more than 100 power equipment, engine and utility vehicle manufacturers and suppliers. OPEI is the advocacy voice behind the environmental education program, TurfMutt.com. OPEI-Canada represents members on a host of issues, including recycling, emissions and other regulatory developments across the Canadian provinces.

For more information, visit www.OPEI.org.

(NAPS)—According to the U.S. Census Bureau, homeowners spent $130 billion on remodeling projects last year. If you hope to join them anytime soon, there are a few things you’ll want to keep in mind. After all, a kitchen remodel can give you one of the best returns on investment as long as you know where to save and where to spend.

I help homeowners who dislike their kitchen evaluate all their options, from cabinets to countertops. Here are a few tips for a kitchen renovation that’s worth the time and investment.

• Play with color. You spend a lot of time in the kitchen and you want it to be an inviting, comfortable place. One way you can really spice things up and show your true personality is with paint. Go bold or lighten things up with your favorite wall color; it’s really up to you and your personal style. It’s also one of the most inexpensive things to change down the road, so don’t be afraid to go outside your comfort zone or experiment with the latest color trends.

• Mix and match materials. Combining materials of different textures—such as stainless steel, concrete and reclaimed wood—adds warmth and visual interest. Invest in a marble slab for baking prep and a coordinating laminate or solid surfacing on other surfaces. This is your kitchen; get creative.

• Make a statement with countertops. One place you can make a big statement is with countertops. The amount you spend on this item should account for only around 10 percent of your kitchen renovation budget. For this reason, I prefer working with Formica® brand laminate. Through the latest design and print technologies, you can get the look of granite and marble without breaking your budget. For example, the 180fx® line of laminates captures the true scale and color variation of exotic, natural surfaces but at a fraction of the cost.

• Update your cabinets. While this can be a pricey endeavor, new cabinets can completely transform the look of your kitchen. No budget to replace them completely? You can create a unique look by adding laminate to the fronts of cabinet doors and drawers. Even more simple: Update them with a coat of paint, add new hardware and you’ll be set.

For more tips on renovating and getting the best bang for your buck, visit the Knowledge section at www.formica.com.
When you bought your home some years ago, you gave little thought to the roof. It was in good condition, which the inspector confirmed, and that was the last time you gave it any thought until now. Time has taken its toll on your roof, and leaks have started to occur. You could patch it, but the best course of action would be to get a new roof.

Depending upon where you live and the style of your house, your old roof could be made of various materials. Asphalt is the most common and can be found on roofs all over the country. Older, more rustic homes may have wood shakes, while Spanish- and Italian-style homes may have clay tiles. If you live on the East Coast in a historic home, your roof may be slate. If you live in a Victorian or contemporary-style home, your roof may be metal. If you live on the beach, you may have a fiber cement roof, which can withstand the salty air and winds.

In the majority of cases, homeowners select the same material for their new roof as before. That way, they can stay true to the style of their home. Sometimes, however, it may make better sense to switch materials. Although cheaper, asphalt would not look right on a Spanish-style house with an original tile roof. However, if you live in an older home with a slate roof, you may want to go for a less expensive asphalt roof, which is lighter and easier to maintain. To determine the route you should go, speak to your roofer. They should be able to advise you on the best choice of roofing material for your area and style of home.

If you’re handy, you may be able to replace your roof yourself. Most homeowners, however, find that it is easier to hire a roofer. If you choose this option, make sure you shop around. Don’t select the first roofer you speak to. Get estimates and references and check them out. Find out exactly what is included in the estimate, how long the job will take and what you can expect. Select a roofer with experience who will do a quality job. Having a new roof installed can be expensive, so make sure you choose someone who will do it right the first time around. You don’t want to have to pay for additional repairs.

You want your new roof to last a long time. Select the right roofing material for your home and the right professional for the job.

My wife and I would like to thank Justice Construction and T&G Custom Cabinetry. They recently designed and remodeled our kitchen. They went in with a plan and completed within a reasonable amount of time. We are very pleased with their work and would recommend them highly. So thank you, Joe, Dean and Gene for making our dream come true.

— Butch and Mary Hartwell
(StatePoint) Time spent in the bathroom can be precious, as it may be your only solo time. When prioritizing home upgrades, consider first transforming a ho-hum, conventional bathroom into an oasis of comfort, style and ultimate relaxation.

Relax
Replace outdated fixtures with new top-quality options that offer greater functionality.

Manufacturers such as Mansfield Plumbing, produce fixtures and fittings designed to work in tandem. Such “suites” of a toilet, sink and bathtub can improve the look and feel of a bathroom.

Make your bathroom the perfect retreat by investing in millwork products that resist humidity. From bathtubs to ceiling medallions, polyurethane is a more practical material than traditional wood. It is lightweight, easy to install, and most importantly, designed to resist the humidity of bathing.

To get the look of a luxury hotel, the experts at Fypon, which produce thousands of pieces of polyurethane millwork, moulding and trim in a variety of architectural styles, recommend a few project ideas:
- Install a set of pilasters on both sides of your shower stall and a door crosshead over-head to upgrade your bathroom’s look.
- Surround mirrors and decorative accent windows with painted or stained polyurethane mouldings that complement the room.
- Install chair rail moulding around the bathroom to add dimension. Paint above or below the moulding and use wallpaper, paneling or a different color paint in the other section. Find more project ideas at www.Fypon.com.

While many think of the bathroom as a place to take care of necessary business, you can easily give yours an upgrade that will transform it into a whole lot more.

Turn Your Bathroom into a Relaxing Oasis

Give Your House A Fresh Start: Get The Ductwork Cleaned

(NAPS)—While professionally cleaned ductwork can be a breath of fresh air to many houses, there are a few facts you should know when it’s time to have your home’s air ducts cleaned.

1. In a typical six-room home, up to 40 pounds of dust are created annually through everyday living. Your heating and cooling system is the lungs of your home. The dander, dust, chemicals and other contaminants are pulled into the HVAC system, where they can build up and possibly contribute to health problems, especially for people with respiratory conditions, autoimmune disorders or allergies.

2. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, 25 to 40 percent of the energy used for heating or cooling a home is wasted.

Contaminants in the heating and cooling system cause it to work harder and shorten the life of your system. A clean HVAC system doesn’t have to work as hard so it uses less energy.

3. When you do hire a professional cleaner, ask if it belongs to NADCA, a trade association of the HVAC inspection, maintenance and restoration industry. Its members have signed a Code of Ethics and invested time and resources into industry-related training and education. They also have general liability insurance.

4. You should be aware that some non-NADCA companies use scare tactics and “bait and switch” methods to squeeze money out of their clients or don’t clean the HVAC system at all. Look for the industry’s standards.

How To Tell You’re Getting A Professional Cleaner
- Is the company able to show proof of NADCA membership and certification?
- Is the contractor willing to conduct a thorough inspection of the HVAC system prior to per- forming any work and disclose any problems discovered?
- Will the contractor make the supply and return air ductwork, the air-stream side of the heat exchanger and the secondary heat exchanger clean?
- After cleaning, are access panels properly sealed; blower blades and compartment clean and free of oil, dust and debris? Point a flashlight into the cooling coil. Does light shine through? If the coil is clean, check to make sure the coil fins are straight and evenly spaced and the coil drain pan is clean and that it is draining properly. Do the filters fit properly and are they the proper efficiency recommended by the manufacturer?

Learn More
You can get free brochures about HVAC inspection, maintenance and restoration as well as a complete checklist and more information online at http://nadca.com.
**Spray Foam—Smart Choice For Energy-Efficient Buildings**

(NAPS) - Designing an energy-efficient home or building no longer simply a great idea, but is becoming mandatory in some of the United States. In fact, many states now require builders to reduce energy use in homes and businesses. Twenty-five states have implemented the Energy Efficiency Resource Standards (EERS), which are standards approved by the U.S. Department of Energy and set long-term goals to lower energy use by utilities and consumers.

Whether it’s in new construction, a renovation or a retrofit job, spray foam can be a great investment for your home.

This is especially relevant in states with high energy costs, like Texas, New York and California. In Texas, the average person spends $5,983 a year on energy, including a large amount for air-conditioning in the hot Southwestern summer. In 2009, New Yorkers consumed 15 percent more than the U.S. average for energy, including for heating homes during cold winters.

In California, home of some of the stronger energy efficiency standards, it is estimated that heating and cooling costs account for 45 percent of the average household energy bill. Spray foam insulation is already helping cut costs there. As of 2013, new homes in California using spray foam insulation are saving approximately $3.3 million each year. These successes have helped California on its way to ‘leading the nation in energy efficiency,’ according to Gov. Jerry Brown.

To learn more about the benefits of spray foam insulation, visit www.whysprayfoam.org.

**DIY HOME IMPROVEMENT: SPRING STYLING**

As winter draws to a close, and the days get longer, our thoughts turn to outdoor home improvement projects. Have you been dreaming of building a new deck, adding on a room or constructing a garage? Well, spring is here and your dreams can come true.

**Decks, Garages and Room Additions**

Decks, garages and room additions are the most popular spring home improvement projects, says Scott Steffan of Steffan Construction in Morton, IL. Everyone enjoys spending time outdoors during spring. Building a deck can bring new life to a seldom-used backyard. Adults will find it a quiet and relaxing retreat; kids, a place to hang out with their friends. Nothing beats casual dining outdoors on a warm spring evening.

Plan your deck to take advantage of the yard features you most admire, such as flower beds or a grove of trees. When building a deck, work carefully around existing trees. Try not to disturb their roots during the foundation stage of construction and don’t allow heavy equipment to park near them. Until now pressure-treated wood has been the standard for decking. Today, advances in technology have produced a new product called composite decking. Composite decking is made of a combination of plastics and wood chips or sawdust. It contains over 50% recycled materials, making it environmentally friendly, and it is durable, strong and resistant to warping, cracking, splitting and termites. Composite decking does not need sealing, painting or staining, and since it doesn’t absorb moisture, it will look new for years to come. All of these features make composite decking virtually maintenance free. But that freedom doesn’t come without a cost. While a typical 10–16’ deck made with pressure-treated wood might run $700–$800 in materials, composite decking for the same sized deck would cost two to three times that price.

Family room additions are one of the earliest spring projects to get started once the ground thaws. Typically, the planning stages of the project take place throughout the winter, such as working up a floor plan, collecting bids and selecting materials and colors. As spring approaches, homeowners and contractors are anxious to break ground. “The average home today is smaller with sliding doors that open onto a patio or deck off the back of the house. Families want a place to hang out together so the sliders are removed and that becomes the opening for the addition,” says Scott. A 16’ x 20’ family room addition off the back of a house is the most requested size. Usually the homeowner will want vaulted ceilings or a fireplace. It’s a resurgence of the great room where multiple activities take place in the same area. One end of the room might contain a big-screen television and group seating, while the other end includes space for a desk with a computer or large table for games or school projects. A room addition such as this may take two to three months to complete and cost between $15,000 and $25,000, depending on the complexity of the project and materials used.

Most of the additions Scott builds have crawlspaces underneath, but he’s putting full basements in as well. When thinking about a large project such as this, homeowners should “have a budget in mind and zero in on what level of quality they want.” For example, countertops range from $20/ft. for the average top up to $100/ft. for granite. Most reputable contractors are flexible and offer homeowners suggestions for getting the highest-quality materials while staying within their budget.

During the winter, some do research to get a feel for the price you’re willing to spend on individual items, such as tile flooring or bay windows. Come spring, you’ll be armed and ready to make those final decisions.

Another popular spring home improvement project centers on the garage—either erecting a new garage where there was none before or replacing a crumbling, one-stall, detached garage. Many homeowners are now opting to tear down their old one-stall, detached garages and build new two-stall garages tucked behind and attached to their homes.

The most important thing homeowners can do when building a deck, adding a room or constructing a garage is to follow the city codes and get inspections if required. Then and only then can you give new life to the areas of your home that sorely need it.