

Winterizing outdoors equipment



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

I am usually very diligent about maintaining and winterizing my sporting equipment. The problem is, I usually don't remember it until the following spring when I want to use it again. This year, things will be different as I vow to get everything ready for the long winter.

Anything that runs on gasoline needs to be winterized. The list includes lawn mowers, boat motors, weed whackers, garden tractors, chain saws, pumps and generators. Gasoline engines, whether two-stroke or four-stroke, all need special attention.

Gasoline begins to degrade and lose its combustibility as a result of oxidation and evaporation in three to six months, if stored in a metal or plastic container. Ethanol-gasoline blends have a shorter life of two months. Gasoline that is stored in a tank, like a car, ATV or boat begins to degrade in as little as a month.

Old gas is not contaminated, but loses its combustible properties and volatile compounds. Using old gasoline can damage internal engine components. When left in carburetors and fuel systems, old gas forms a gummy residue that causes blockages. Fuel with ethanol in it draws water into the fuel line, which can lead to internal corrosion. All of this boils down to an engine that won't start in the spring, or worse.



This ruined flashlight, caused by battery leakage, is just one of the reasons your outdoor equipment needs to be winterized. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

Small engines should always be drained of fuel before the winter months. Special attention should be given to assure that all fuel is out of the carburetor and fuel pump as well. When fuel can't be drained, such as motor homes and large fuel tanks, add a fuel stabilizer to the tank. Stabilized gasoline can last a year or more without degrading.

At the very least, engines you forgot to winterize will be very difficult, if not impossible to start come spring. This serves as a punishment for forgetting to winterize your equipment. It happens so often around here that it has become a springtime ritual.

Special attention must be paid to boats, boat motors, and RVs, when it comes to winterizing. Water lines and drains need special attention to prevent freezing and bursting of lines. These burst

lines will not be discovered until the first trip in the spring, further punishing you for your forgetfulness.

I do not have the room to discuss all the winterizing necessary in your gasoline-driven equipment. If you are without knowledge, please seek the advice of qualified persons. Improperly storing of recreational equipment can lead, not only to an inconvenient situation, but one so costly as to give the family finances a double hernia.

An area of special concern over the long winter is the battery. The battery in your ATV, boat, camper or motor home must be kept charged over the long winter months. Trickle chargers work best here as they can be plugged in and forgotten until spring with many of the smart chargers.

It is best to remove the batteries from the vehicle

and charge them in a separate location. Be certain that all the cells are full, and refill any that are down with distilled water.

Any portable tools or appliances should have the batteries removed for storage. Alkaline batteries can and will leak over the winter. The surprise is a ruined piece of equipment, such as a GPS, because you forgot to remove the batteries before putting it in storage, serving as further punishment for your forgetfulness. Besides, I like to start the spring out with fresh batteries in everything.

The rest of your equipment requires some attention before you file it all away until spring. There is nothing worse than getting loaded up for the first camping trip of the year and pulling out a rotten smelling tent and a sleeping bag that smells like it was left over from the rainy season in the Amazon.

The basic process for all this type of equipment is to clean, dry, repair, treat and store. This will cover your tents, sleeping bags, pads, boots, clothes and pack.

Get a bucket of a gentle, non-detergent soap and wipe everything down. Use a sponge or rag to clean up any spots on tents, packs

and sleeping bags. If you see any mildew, spray a little white vinegar on them. Don't scrape as you do not want to remove any of the waterproof coatings. Just easy cleaning will remove most of the year's residue.

Everything must be left out to dry. Don't rush the drying times, as moisture is a death sentence for stored sporting equipment. If you can, set up tents and hang sleeping bags on clothesline to air dry in the sun.

Once everything is dry, look it all over for anything that may need repaired. The tear in the tent or sleeping bag, the boot that needs new laces, or the tarp that is no longer waterproof, should all be addressed before storage.

There are many waterproofing products available to spray down your equipment. Patch kits are available to mend those leaks, and fresh treatments for the boots are in order to keep them waterproof and prevent cracking of the leather. Doing all of this now assures you it will be ready come spring.

The last step is storage of the equipment. Don't just stuff your freshly dried, repaired, and treated equipment in a wet basement

or direct sunlight. Store items in bags bigger than they came in, so they can breathe. Look for a place with an even temperature, and it must be dry.

The thing I forget most often is to remove batteries from GPS and flashlights. I have since started using the lithium batteries over the alkaline ones because they last longer, are not as sensitive to the cold or heat, and most importantly, they don't leak when I forget to take them out for storage.

I really am going to try and get everything winterized and ready for the long storage this year. I am sick of having to rebuild everything in the spring because of my forgetfulness. Although, rebuilding carburetors has become sort of a spring ritual for me.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org.

For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email elkhunter77@icloud.com.

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CHRISTMAS

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One more thing. I've discovered the trees always look smaller when they're out in the forest. It might be a good idea to take a tape measure with you or hold your arms out next to the tree to get an idea of the size of the tree. You probably don't want to end up with a tree the size of Clark's tree in the movie "Christmas Vacation."

After you get your tree home and situated in the house, add water to the tree stand. The tree is going to be thirsty when you first set it up, so check the amount of water in the stand every day for a few days. You'll find the tree takes up less and less water after a few days. If you don't want a dry and brittle tree that drops needles everywhere, be sure to make checking the water level of the tree every few days part of your routine.

If you have younger children or grandchildren this could be a perfect opportunity to teach them about trees, the forest and the wildlife that live there. Maybe you'll find that an outing to find the perfect Christmas tree is so special that you'll want to make it a part of your Christmas tradition.

Linda Corwine McIntosh in an ISA-certified arborist, licensed commercial pesticide applicator, advanced master gardener.



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