PLANT LIFE COLUMN

LAWNMOWER SAFETY

Rain is a wonderful thing. It makes our flowers and trees grow. However, it also makes our lawns grow, causing us to have to bring out the lawnmowers. With all the rain that we've been getting lately, I'm sure you've been mowing more than you would like to be. Although mowing is a chore that most of us do not enjoy, it is important for us to always remember the safety procedures while enduring this treacherous task.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, nearly 100,000 people are seriously injured from lawnmowers every year. "Seriously injured" meaning that they required treatment for their injuries in hospital emergency rooms. Approximately 75 people die from the result of their injuries, with 1 in 5 of these deaths being children.

The most common injuries from lawnmowers include contact with the rotating blade, being hit from propelling objects, overturning on riding lawnmowers, and being run over by riding lawnmowers.

Injuries occur when individuals clean the discharge chute of grass clippings or perform other maintenance on the lawnmower while it is running. Objects, such as rocks, wire, and sticks can be thrown at speeds above 170 miles per hour and travel a distance of 50 feet or more, causing death or severe injuries. Overturning of riding lawnmowers occur when they are used on steep slopes or ridden across a slope instead of up and down the slope. Riding lawnmowers also may run over victims when the operator fails to look when backing up or when children run into the path of the lawnmower.

So, how can you help prevent these injuries caused by lawnmowers? The following safety procedures should be practiced:

- Read the operator's manual. Become familiar with the instructions and follow them carefully, including all safety procedures described in the manual.
- Clear the lawn of any objects before mowing. These objects include toys, pinecones, rocks, sticks and any other objects that can be picked up and thrown by the blade and cause injuries.
- Check the safety guards and shields on the lawnmower. Be sure that all the devices are in place and are not damaged before operating the machine. Shields and guards are designed to protect you from numerous injuries and should be used.
- Dress properly for the job. Wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts to protect you from flying objects. Wear close-fitting clothes and no jewelry, so they will not become entangled in the moving parts of the lawnmower. Also, wear sturdy shoes, with slip resistant soles - this means no bare feet, sandals, or sneakers. Remember to always use eye protection, heavy gloves, and hearing protection.
- Keep children and pets indoors while mowing. Sometimes they can be unpredictable and may run into the path of the lawnmower without the operator's knowledge.
- Handle gasoline with care. Never refill the gasoline tank while the lawnmower is running. Let the motor cool for five minutes before refilling. Always fuel up outdoors and properly clean up any spills.
- Do not allow riders on riding lawnmowers, especially children. They can easily fall from the machine and be run over. Prohibit horseplay around all lawnmowers and use lawnmowers only for which it was designed.
- Keep the lawnmower in good operating condition. Keep it clean of debris, the blade sharpened, and nuts and bolts securely fastened. Never try to remove debris from the blade while the lawnmower is running.

During the past ten years, manufacturers have incorporated all kinds of safety features in their product designs, however hazard prevention depends on the awareness, concern and proper training of you, the
machine operator. You must use the equipment properly, with caution and follow the safety procedures mentioned in order to prevent injuries to you and to others. Remember that safety does begin with you.

For more information on lawnmower safety or for information on other gardening topics, please contact the Osceola County Master Gardeners. They are available to take your calls, Monday to Friday from 10am to 2pm, at (321) 697-3000.

Interested in learning more about gardening? Want to help out your community? If so, then you may be a candidate for the Osceola County Master Gardeners. Please call for more details. Classes begin in September.

Free gardening and landscape classes are currently being offered in Osceola County. "Butterfly Gardening" will be held on July 29th and "Planting for Drought" will be held July 30th. Both will be located at the St. Cloud Civic Center at 6:30 pm. Pre-registration is required. Call for more details.

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