



Shopping For Yard Equipment: Things To Know

(NAPS)—If you're like most people, when spring comes, you're ready to get outside and make your yard both beautiful and functional. Maybe you're aiming to have the best yard on the block, want to install an outdoor family room, or want to expand your space for entertaining. Perhaps your kids or pets could use a better space for play. Regardless of need, now is the time to get "backyard ready."

The Tools You'll Need

"Completing big outdoor jobs is always easier with help from outdoor power equipment," said Kris Kiser, president and CEO of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI). "The right outdoor power equipment can help you get the work done faster and can help you safely maintain your yard." These tips from Kiser can help you select the machinery you need to get the job done.

- **Plan your needs.** Draw a sketch of your yard. Include any major features such as trees, bushes, an herb or vegetable garden, flower beds, lawn furniture, play or sports equipment, an outdoor patio, or birdbath. Note where maintenance may be required. Will bushes need to be trimmed back from your home or garage? Do you want to put in some flowering bushes or a tree? Are you planning to install a fence and more grass because of your pet? Now list the tools and equipment needed to take care of your yard and what will make the job easier.
- **Consider equipment needed.** Visit your garage or shed and find all your lawn and garden tools. Wheel out your mower and get out other equipment. Look it over and make a list of what's needed or could be upgraded. Repair anything that needs attention or identify where a newer or other machine is required. If you have a large vegetable garden, you need a cultivator or tiller. If you have a large lawn, an upgrade to a riding lawn mower might make mowing easier. A string trimmer might make caring for bushes or trimming grass near



With the right equipment, you can make the grass greener on your side of the fence.

a fence line easier. A pole pruner can help trim back limbs that are too high to reach safely with a saw and a leaf blower can clear leaves faster than a rake.

- **Research equipment online before you buy.** Think about efficiencies of scale. The right equipment can mean more time for other activities and make doing yard work more enjoyable, too. Doing online research in advance can help you pick the right equipment for the job. Outdoor power equipment can be gas, electric or battery powered and technology is rapidly affecting product design. There are even robotic lawn mowers available today. Equipment may be sized to handle a smaller job or a massive one. Ultimately, your decision should be based on your needs.
- **Ask questions.** Talk with the staff at the store or ask online about the equipment. In the store, ask to pick up and hold equipment to determine its "fit" for you. Discuss safety features and ask about fueling and care instructions. Find out how often equipment may need to be serviced.
- **Make a plan for storage and maintenance.** Store your equipment in a cool and dry place. It should typically be serviced at the end of the fall and the beginning of the spring. Put service dates on your calendar with a reminder.

Learn More

For safety information and to find out which manufacturers make various outdoor power equipment products, go to www.opei.org.



Help Detector Dogs: Don't Pack A Pest

(NAPS)—If you've returned to the U.S. from an international trip, you've no doubt seen beagles with blue jackets sniffing luggage in the baggage claim area. Visitors to Hawaii and Puerto Rico may also see these four-legged officers in green jackets helping to find prohibited fruits and vegetables hidden in luggage. As cute as they are, these detector dogs, who work alongside U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials and USDA, are performing an important job. They are helping to keep harmful invasive pests out of our country, including 19 called Hungry Pests, which can severely damage our crops, trees and landscapes.

Invasive pests cost our country \$40 billion each year in damages and related costs. They come from other countries and can spread quickly, since they have few natural predators here. These invasive insects and plant diseases are the reason we are losing oranges to citrus greening disease, and ash trees—a popular shade tree in parks and communities—to the emerald ash borer beetle. But by knowing what not to bring back, you can help protect so much that we love.

Detector dogs help human inspectors catch incoming materials that may



USDA detector dogs help keep dangerous pests from America's plants.

be otherwise overlooked. Through their keen sense of smell, the dogs can quickly scan unopened bags and alert USDA and Customs officials as to which ones should be hand-inspected. In fact, dogs are able to detect a single scent among many overlapping ones. And, on average, they have hundreds of millions of scent-detecting cells, as compared to humans, who only have five million.

Why are beagle and beagle mixes chosen for this role? Because of their smaller size and gentle disposition, they are good around people and tend not to be intimidating. They also have a keen appetite, so happily train and work for treats. Most of the dogs come from shelters. Those selected are sent to the USDA National Detector Dog Training Center in Georgia, where they go through rigorous training. Those who successfully complete the program become detector dogs.

Be thankful these dogs are trained to find prohibited items before they enter the States. A seemingly harmless piece of fruit could carry an invasive pest hidden inside. And if it finds its way to your neighborhood, your trees and plants could be its next target for destruction.

So, what is safe to bring back home? Small quantities of canned foods or foods packed in vacuum-sealed jars (except those that contain meat or poultry) are generally allowed. Some fresh fruits, vegetables, plants, flowers and agriculture items may also be allowed, but only after they've been inspected and cleared by USDA or Customs officials. Be sure to visit USDA's "Traveler Information" page before your return trip to learn more and always declare all food, plants and other agriculture items to USDA or Customs officials.

When it comes to protecting our country from invasive pests, you can make all the difference. Be wise when traveling and know what's safe to bring back, so you don't pack a pest. Learn more by visiting www.HungryPests.com.

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Wednesday's Graphic

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