

GARAGE SALES

Buying Lawn and Garden Equipment

The weather will be warming up soon, and it's time to get out in the yard. One way you can do so and get a good bargain on lawn and garden equipment is to hit the garage sales.

LOOK AT REPAIR RATES

Consumer Reports is the go-to for judging quality. Their experts poll tens of thousands of readers on the quality of the equipment they own and have found discrepancies between brands and even between tools from the same brand. Also, they say, look for recall notices online and make sure you can resolve the issue on your own or get it repaired.

SIGNS OF WEAR AND TEAR

Some signs to look for, Consumer Reports says, go beyond dings and scrapes. Look for sediment in the gas tank, thick or dirty engine oil, worn controls like frayed pull cords or worn pedals. Also look to see the condition of the seller's property. If they have acres and acres of grass, the mower probably saw some tough use, even if the



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seller says otherwise. Keep a sharp eye out for rust or any shoddy repairs.

BRING A MECHANIC

If you're looking at a big piece of equipment that may cost you some money, remember you can always

bring your own mechanic to look at the equipment. Ask if the seller has any of the original paperwork for equipment. It can help confirm the equipment's age and may also help you determine whether there's any warranty left.

COMPARE THE COST

Do your research before you make any purchase, whether new or used. Know what features you want and what you have to have. Compare the cost of a new item to the used one you're looking at. If a new trimmer is

\$50 and the used one is \$30, it may be worth the extra dough to get a new model with a warranty.

TAKE A TEST DRIVE

A used riding mower may be a great deal, BobVila.com says. Make sure to take a test drive. Look for:

- An engine that starts within a few seconds and on the first try.
- A smooth idle with no smoking.
- No stalling.
- Working brakes.
- An even cut.

Also look for things like low fluid levels and leaks, dull blades, bad tires or aged belts or wiring. Keep an eye out for uneven wear, too, such as tires more worn on one side than the other, as that could mean a bigger, more expensive problem.

MAINTENANCE

Once you've picked out a new piece of equipment, whether new or used, make sure to keep up the maintenance. Some things to do regularly include draining the gas out of gas-powered equipment at the end of each season. Check the oil and other fluids regularly, and make sure to keep the equipment clean. Take a look at air filters and spark plugs and make sure they're clean and in good working order.

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BUYER'S TIP

Get the Maintenance Records

Ask the seller for any maintenance records they may have kept. These records can help resolve warranty claims and prove the equipment was well-kept.

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