

Eight Tractor Tips

Simple, DIY maintenance will keep your tractor running smoothly for years of farm work.

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A few years back, I invested in a brand-new “lady tractor” for my farm. I call it a lady tractor because it’s a sub-compact tractor and at 16.7 PTO horsepower, it’s the perfect size for me and my farm. Not too big. Not too small. I use it for mowing grass (it has a belly mower) and for dragging my arena and fields. It’s wonderful and I couldn’t live without it.

Over the past six years, I’ve bumped my little orange tractor into more fence posts than I can count and it has a few dents. But it still runs well, and I credit this fact to the regular, but let’s face it, minimal, maintenance I give it. Here are a few tips that will hopefully help your tractor take a licking and keep on ticking.

Check and change the oil regularly. Read the manual to find out how often your tractor’s manufacturer recommends you do it. It’s not that hard! My tractor just requires a wrench to turn the plug and a shallow pan to catch the oil. Run the tractor for a few minutes to heat the oil so it’s thinner and flows out of the hole more easily. Screw the plug back in and add fresh oil. The manual should tell you what kind of oil to use.

If your tractor has filters, replace them regularly or if they are washable, wash them. The manual will show you where they are.

Just like a car, your tractor will have coolant in it. Check regularly to make sure your tractor’s coolant levels are correct. Believe me, you don’t want your tractor to overheat and damage the engine. Fixing that can be expensive.

Keep fresh fuel in your tractor. Old diesel fuel can cause lots of black, smelly exhaust smoke and you may have insufficient engine power. Use fresh fuel when possible.

Keep the air screen in front of the engine clear. On my tractor, the screen is in front of my knees. If this screen gets clogged with leaves or dust, your engine could overheat. I just remove debris with a brush I keep in the barn.

After mowing grass, I always hose off the underside of the tractor, making sure to get the blades as clean as possible. Manure and grass can dry on the blades and lumpy blades cut badly. You might need a pressure washer for this as a normal hose may not have enough power to clean the blades adequately.

I usually take my tractor to the dealer every 100 hours of use for a proper going over. I can’t sharpen or replace the blades, so I let a mechanic take care of this. Having sharp blades is a must so I leave it to the pros. I also let them take care of the transmission/hydraulic oil because I haven’t taken the time to find out how and where you change it.

I drive my tractor into my slant load, stock trailer and drive it to the tractor dealership. Doing this probably isn’t the best thing for my trailer’s ramp or hinges, but sometimes we do things we probably shouldn’t. Most dealerships have flat-bed trailers you can borrow to transport your tractor and most will collect your tractor for a fee.

Although it’s easy to get carried away while mowing, try your best to avoid driving over rocks. Rocks can bend your mower’s blades and then it won’t mow as efficiently. You’ll soon notice that your front lawn or your field looks raggedy and uneven after you’ve mowed it. Time to get the blades sharpened!

Also, pay attention to fence posts to your right or left. I’m constantly bashing the mower deck into posts and knocking off and losing the little wheels that keep the deck off the ground. Those cute little wheels are more expensive than you’d think, so be attentive.

And finally, slow down. Even though you want to get the mowing job done quickly, slow down. I find that when I go super fast on my tractor, especially over rutted and uneven ground, it bumps around more and screws loosen, things fall off or break and I have to replace items like the very expensive rear lifting bar (twice in two months!)

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