

Small Engine Won't Start (Mower, Generator, Pressure Washer)

Difficulty: **Beginner** · Time: **30–90 min**

Date: _____ Vehicle / unit: _____ Mileage / hours: _____

SAFETY DISCLAIMER: General educational information only, not professional advice. Vehicle, marine, propane, fuel and electrical work can cause serious injury, death, fire or property damage. Follow your manufacturer's service manual, use rated jack stands, work ventilated and away from ignition sources, and call a qualified professional when in doubt.

Key safety warnings

- Disconnect the spark plug wire before touching the blade, carb, or anything that could turn the engine.
- Work outdoors. Never run a generator or mower in a garage, shed, or near windows — CO kills.
- Let the engine cool before refueling; drain fuel into an approved container away from flames.

Tools & supplies

- ☐ Spark plug tester
- ☐ Spark plugs (per manual)
- ☐ Spark plug socket
- ☐ Carburetor cleaner
- ☐ Fuel stabilizer
- ☐ Safety glasses

Checklist

- ☐ Fuel fresh & valve on
- ☐ Oil level
- ☐ Plug cleaned/replaced & gapped
- ☐ Spark present
- ☐ Air filter
- ☐ Carb bowl & jet cleaned
- ☐ Fuel filter / lines / vent cap

Step reference

1. Start simple: fuel in the tank, fuel valve on, choke set, safety bail/handle engaged, oil level correct (many engines have a low-oil shutdown).
2. Check the fuel: gasoline older than ~30 days without stabilizer can gum up carbs. Drain and refill with fresh fuel.
3. Pull and inspect the spark plug. Clean or replace, check the gap, and use a spark tester for a strong spark.
4. Inspect the air filter; replace if clogged or oil-soaked.
5. If it starts with a spray of starting fluid then dies, the carburetor is likely restricted. Remove the bowl, clean the jet with carb cleaner and a soft wire, and reassemble.
6. Check for a clogged fuel filter or a pinched line, and that the tank vent cap isn't blocked.

Stop and call a pro if...

- Engine has low compression or a bent crankshaft (after hitting something).
- Generator output problems (wiring to a home requires a transfer switch and an electrician).

Notes
