



Robomow RS612 review:

Robomow cuts out the hard part of lawn care

MSRP: \$1,599.00

Robomow RS612 (Part #: RS612)



CNET EDITORS' RATING

THE GOOD The \$1,600 Robomow RS612 is a robot lawnmower that can automatically cut your yard without much interference.

THE BAD It's expensive and still requires some work on your part. You can't use a Robomow if your yard has deep inclines or is larger than three quarters of an acre.

THE BOTTOM LINE If lawn care is the bane of your existence and you just don't want to hire a gardener, the Robomow is a fun, efficient way to cut back on your summer yard work.



7.5
OVERALL



Mowing the lawn is a necessary evil if you own a home with a yard. It takes a lot of time and energy to keep your yard from being an embarrassment to your neighborhood. And when temperatures reach the triple digits and the humidity is so thick it feels like you're swimming through the air, cutting the grass is high on the list of worst yard chores.

A company called Robomow aims to alleviate some of the pain of lawn care with a line of battery-powered, robot lawnmowers that do most of the work for you. One of these mowers, the \$1,600 Robomow RS612, delivers on much of its promise to take care of your yard without much interference on your part. (Robomow doesn't offer the RS612 in Australia or the UK, but that price works out to AU\$2,079 and £1,226.) The Robomow excels in automatic mode, in which it ventures out on its own and keeps your grass cut to a uniform length. And its Bluetooth-connected app provides an easy way to adjust the Robomow's settings and remote control the mower if there are some additional spots on your property that could use a trim.

Despite its high level of autonomy, you still have to lend the Robomow a hand every once in a while. You have to spend an afternoon setting up a perimeter wire that outlines the boundaries of your yard, similar to an electric dog fence, so the Robomow knows where it needs to go. You also have to occasionally clean out the undercarriage and wheels. And the Robomow isn't great for every yard; it struggles with terrain that is overgrown or hilly.

The Robomow does a good job keeping an average yard looking pretty pristine, and it slashes the amount of time you'll need to spend on manual lawn care. At \$1,600, this is going to cost you a lot more than hiring a professional to tend to your yard. But if you want to cut out the middle man and lounge a bit more during the summer, start saving your money.

Getting to know the Robomow

Robot lawnmowers are a relatively new and expensive category of smart lawn care that are the outdoor cousin of robot vacuums. Robomow, an Israel-based company founded in 1995, has five battery-powered robot lawnmowers starting at \$1,000 that are designed to tackle different-sized lawns. The RS612 model is intended for yards that are a quarter of an acre or less. The most expensive model, the \$2,100 RS630, handles the largest area -- three-quarters of an acre.



Technical editor Steve Conaway installs the perimeter wire around my front yard. Chris Monroe/CNET

Sound expensive? Robomow's products are the more affordable options when you compare them to other robot lawnmowers. Models from Husqvarna's Automower line cost \$2,000 to \$3,500 (about £1,533 AU\$ 2,600 to £2,685/AU\$4,550) depending on the size of the yards they are designed to cut. The LawnBott LB85EL, which covers half an acre of yard and is also app connected, costs \$2,800 (£2,150/AU\$3,640), and the LawnBott LB300EL from the same manufacturer covers one and a half acres and costs about \$5,200 (£4,000/AU\$6,750).

Setup is the most time-consuming part of having a Robomow. First, you have to give your yard one last cut with a traditional mower. You select a spot near the edge of your yard for the base station where the Robomow will charge between uses. It's a little unsettling to leave such an expensive piece of equipment out on the edge of your lawn. To protect help protect against theft, the Robomow will begin to beep loudly if you try to remove it from the base station without entering a four-digit PIN. However, an annoying alarm that you can turn off by flipping the power switch under the Robomow's hood doesn't feel like the best protection against sticky, grass-covered fingers.

From the base station, you lay bright green wire around the perimeter of your yard and secure it to the ground with small plastic pegs that come with the Robomow. The company includes a helpful measuring stick to use for installation that shows the proper distance the Robomow should be from barriers like sidewalks and buildings. Grass eventually grows over the perimeter wire, and you won't be able to see it after about a week.

Once you've finished installing the perimeter wire, you connect the base station to a power box that you plug in and mount onto a wall of your home. The power box includes indicators that show when the Robomow is mowing or docked at the base station.

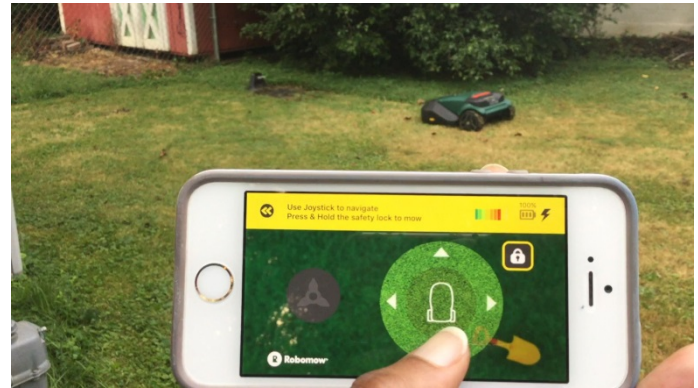
The Robomow takes 24 hours to charge before it's ready to mow. The default setting is automatic operation, which means it will leave the base station and begin cutting on its own. You can change how often you want the Robomow to cut your yard and select days and hours that you don't want it to run on mower's operation panel. You have to lift up the Robomow's hood and use a manual dial to adjust the length to which you want the Robomow to cut your grass.

Once the Robomow gets going, it moves across the lawn in a random pattern. The two mowing blades are attached to a floating mowing deck that adjusts to follow the contours of your yard. One tiny wheel at the front of the mower helps steer the Robomow while two sturdy back wheels push it forward. The black bumper wrapped around the front of the Robomow detects

large objects in its path so it can move around them. The bumper, however, has to actually contact the object to know it was there and move around, so it's best to keep kids and animals away.

App makes a game out of lawn care

Robomow equipped the RS612 with Bluetooth so you can monitor it via an iOS and Android-compatible app. If you have your Robomow on automatic operation and it's fully charged, the app will provide information about when the next mow cycle will begin, how much of your lawn has been cut and how long the mower has been out in your yard. You can also use the app to adjust your mowing settings, which is a much easier alternative than using the LCD menu screen that's built into the body of the Robomow.



The app has a remote control feature that lets you control exactly where the Robomow goes. Tyler Lizenby/CNET

The app's coolest feature allows you to remote control the Robomow. The mower was responsive to the joystick-like commands I made in the app. This was the most useful for small areas without a perimeter wire that needed a quick cut.

Because the Robomow uses Bluetooth to connect to the app, you have to be close to the mower to access most of the app's features. I'd lose connection when the Robomow was mowing the outermost corners of my front yard and I was standing at my front door with the app open, a distance of less than 20 feet. I understand making features such as the remote control accessible only when you're in range. But it would be convenient to access lawn and mower settings if you were farther away. For example, it would've been nice to have received alerts while I was at the office when the Robomow was mowing my yard.

Performance

The Robomow works best in automatic mode as a lawn maintainer. My grass always looked like it was freshly cut in the four weeks I set the Robomow to automatically cut my yard on medium frequency (two complete mowing cycles per week). My front yard is relatively small (less than a

quarter of an acre), so it took the Robomow about 35 minutes to complete a cycle, i.e. cut my entire yard. It also completed the mowing cycle on one charge.

The Robomow can also handle tough jobs, but it's clearly not the mower's sweet spot. The mower cut my grass when it got super high (some patches of weeds had reached 12 inches long), but it stopped mid-mow because it had overheated and needed to cool down. And if need be, the Robomow can cut wet grass, though the company doesn't recommend it (a built-in sensor will tell the mower to stay put if it's raining and on automatic operation). So if you have some neglected property, you'll need to bust out a traditional lawn mower. It's easiest to establish some control over your grass before you send the Robomow out to keep your lawn looking good.

The mower also has limits when it comes to hilly lawns. The company says the Robomow can handle inclines of up to 20 degrees or 35 percent. This isn't the mower you are looking for if you have property on a steep incline.

You can't spend your whole summer watching the Robomow from the comfort of your patio chair. Once a month, you'll need to clear the Robomow's wheels and undercarriage with a stick and damp cloth -- you can't use a power washer or hose because of all the electronics packed into the mower. And you'll probably need to touch up the edges of your yard with your own weed whacker. Because the wire is set about a foot away from buildings, there are some areas of your yard that the mower will miss.

Final thoughts

The Robomow RS612 slashes a lot of the pain out of lawn care. Its automatic operation will keep your yard looking tidy. The Robomow isn't perfect for every yard, and you'll still need to put in a little work and a lot of cash if you add the robot lawnmower to your yard care routine. But it's a good product for folks who love a good gadget, dread cutting the lawn, and have the budget to do something about it.