

Protecting your investment

Garden Tool Maintenance



One of the biggest expenses for home gardeners is tools. High-quality shovels, rakes, pruners, and hand trowels cost more, but will also last longer. Buy the best you can afford and take care of your investment by cleaning and storing tools properly so they will take care of you. The time and effort will extend the tool's life span.

Cleaning Tools

Tools are typically exposed to soil and moisture, which can lead to rust. To preserve tools and keep them in proper working order, they must be clean and dry before storage.

Remove any soil with a wire brush, paint scraper, stiff brush, or strong blast from a hose (Fig. 1).

Wipe the blades of small hand tools such as pruners or shears to remove sap or moisture.

Sap removal: Use turpentine, alcohol or mineral spirits, or fine steel wool to remove stubborn sap.

Oil metal surfaces lightly with a lubricant such as WD-40 to prevent rust.

Wooden handles should be free of rough areas. Sanding will help smooth out these spots. Apply a protective coat of linseed oil to the handle, let it dry, then polish with a soft cloth.

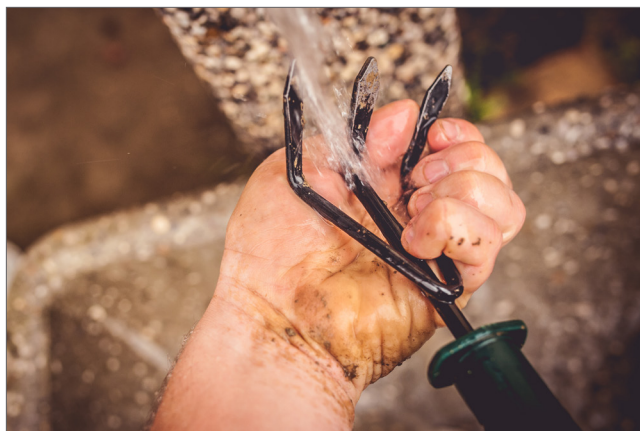


Fig. 1. Remove soil from garden tools with a wire brush, paint scraper, stiff brush, or a strong blast from a hose.



High quality garden tools are an investment that can last a life time with proper care and maintenance.

Pruner Care

High quality pruners can be disassembled for cleaning and sharpening. Many pruners also have replaceable blades.

Scrub away dirt, rust, and sap from pruner blades with a wire brush, sandpaper, or steel wool.

Look for blade damage such as cracks, nicks or burrs. Replace the blades if needed.

Sharpen dull blades. The beveled edge of the blade should be sharpened at the same angle as the bevel.

Sharpening Tools

Sharp garden tools are more efficient at digging or pruning. Tools for sharpening or grinding down nicks are a matter of personal preference and ability. Do not use power grinders. Heat generated by the friction can make the metal brittle.

Always wear appropriate personal protective equipment such as gloves and safety glasses.

Whetstones (Fig. 2) come in different sizes and gradations and need a lubricant such as a 3-in-1 oil.

Diamond-coated flat files can last a lifetime and only need water for lubrication.

Ceramic sharpeners can be used for a quick sharpening job during the season.

Bastard files, or single cut flat files, are good for removing nicks or sharpening blades quickly.

Short-Term Storage

Store tools off the ground and away from the elements in a shed, garage, or barn. Tools that are left outside can absorb moisture from wet grass and dew.

Short-handled tools can be stored using a pegboard system. Outlining the tools on the pegboard (Fig. 3) can help identify any missing tools.

Long-handled tools should be stored on a hanging rack or tool holder to prevent damage to edges.

Long-Term Storage

When you are done with tools at the end of the growing season, thoroughly clean and inspect them.



Fig. 2. Whetstones are a great option for sharpening a wide variety of garden tools. Photo: Mary Fischer.

Determine what needs to be repaired or replaced.

- **Clean all tools parts.**
- **Sharpen or file blades.**
- **Oil metal and wood surfaces.** For additional protection, apply a high quality spray paint to metal surfaces.

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Fig. 3. Storing tools using a pegboard system can help identify when a tool is missing.

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