

Winter Care for Garden Tools and Pots

We all have our prized garden items that have served us well over the years. Perhaps that hard-working hose, gorgeous pot on the deck, or maybe those brand-new pruners are your favorites. Either way, well-functioning tools are a gardener's dream and keeping them that way is actually not that difficult. So now, as we approach the winter season, carve out some time to give your garden gizmos a little TLC.

If your tools are dirty, sweep dirt off with a sturdy bristle brush. Resist the urge to scrape one trowel against another to remove the clods because scraping one blade against another may cause dulling of both tool edges.

Steel wool is useful for working rust spots away. If really dirty, soak the tools in dish soap and warm water, wipe dry, and disinfect with a bleach solution of four parts water and one part bleach.

Check for damage: splitting handles, loosening blades, failing springs, missing screws or other parts can make your tool unsafe to use. Consider repairing or replacing the tool if parts are unavailable. Tighten loose screws or nuts. For pruners, tighten the nut all the way, until it proves difficult to close the blades, then loosen gradually to adjust. Sand wooden handles to smooth any splintered areas, then apply linseed oil to protect and condition the wood.

Did you know that for best performance, hoes and shovels should be sharpened right along with your pruners and shears? Sharpen dull blades by affixing the tool in a vice and running a metal file only one way, in the direction of the bevel. Remember to file down the nicks, too. Special sharpening tools are available at hardware stores as well as replacement tool handles should one be broken beyond repair.

Once clean and repaired, use cooking spray (vegetable oil works as well) or WD-40 lubricant on the metal portions and hang up out of the weather.

Trowels and hand tools can also be plunged in a pot of sand mixed with lubricant (5 gallons sand + $\frac{3}{4}$ quart of oil). This is a great year-round storage method to keep rust at bay.

What About My Garden Hoses?

While in use, identify and mark places where hose leaks are occurring. After draining hoses and removing nozzle heads, examine the hose for the type of repair necessary. For leaks in the line, mender and splicing kits are available as well as hose caps and washers for connection leakage. After finishing the repairs, connect the ends (this keeps critters out) and coil and hang hoses, keeping them unkinked and protected from the weather.

What About My Garden Pots?

Thinking about reusing pots from this year's garden next year? You can certainly do that! However, fungus, bacteria, insect eggs and viruses might still be camped out in your old pot and can be reintroduced to your new plant material if you are not careful. If you want to give your new plants a fighting chance, start them off well with a clean and sterilized pot. It's not a difficult process. In fact, it's about like doing dishes. Empty the pot thoroughly and scrub away caked-on soil with a stiff brush. Mineral deposits may be scratched or scraped away with steel wool or a blade. Soak pots in a 10% bleach solution (one part of bleach to nine parts of water) for at least 10 minutes. After soaking, wash with dish soap and clean water, rinse, and allow to dry. Once dry, stack to store and they'll be ready for the spring.

Although there still may be leaves to rake, it's about time to winterize your garden tools. Put your trusted gardening gadgets into hibernation after they've been properly cleaned, repaired, sanitized and oiled. Spring will be here before we know it and, this way, you'll be ready for another productive gardening season!

[Cleaning and Disinfecting Plant Containers,](https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/1994/3-16-1994/clean.html)
<https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/1994/3-16-1994/clean.html>

[How to Store Garden Tools](#)