

Garden Tool Care

Every gardener has a favorite tool: those keen snippers for deadheading, that nifty weeder with a grippy ergonomic handle for root-lifting dandelions, or that super-sharp hori-hori knife for slicing back roots on pot-bound nursery treasures. You know that tool...it's in your garden shed, and without it you'd be...stumped, muddled, grounded...and any other clever garden-pun predicament you could find yourself in. So here's how to keep it - and your other useful implements - in tip-top shape before tucking them in for the winter.

The Strategy: Clean, Repair and Store

First assemble these suggested items:

- Rags
- Wire brush
- Steel Wool (fine)
- Sandpaper (Medium: 60-100 grit)
- Tarp
- Pliers (for tightening/loosening nuts)
- Machine or vegetable oil or boiled linseed oil (for wooden handles and food-contacted tools)
- Pot(s) of sand (tool storage)
- Sharpening device or file

Clean

Lay all your tools out on a tarp for inspection. Be prepared - some of them won't make the grade. If any are just too far gone, discard them. Rust can be remedied and handles can be replaced, but tools with severely nicked, bent or overly rusted parts may not be salvageable.

Scrub dirt clods with wire brush, and steel wool works for rust spots. Soap is usually not necessary...just rinse and allow to dry.

Repair

Loosen nuts on moving parts (like pruners), then clean and rub all metal with machine oil. Allow to soak in for 15 minutes before wiping dry. Reassemble and tighten.

Use medium grit sandpaper to smooth rough wooden handles, then rub with linseed oil to protect.

Sharpen blade edges on knives, pruners and shovels with a sharpening device or file; using gentle strokes, push along the blade away from your body at a 45-degree angle, or follow the device instructions.

If the tool end of your implement is still serviceable, give it new life with a handle replacement. They can be found at most hardware stores or online.

Store

Hang tools indoors whenever possible; resting them on their metal or blade surfaces, or against other metal tools, can cause damage. If left out in the elements, allow wooden handles to dry before repairing, oiling and storing indoors. Tip: Work ½ gallon boiled linseed or vegetable oil into 5 gallons of sand in a pot, and slide your hand tools into it. Handy-dandy hand tool storage!

Loppers, snippers, trowels and weeders, forks, spades, rakes and edgers, swoes, hoes, shovels and secateurs. Whichever your favorite, the best tools are not cheap, and cheap tools cost more in the long run. Spend a few minutes to maintain your tools - they'll be ready and in great shape when you reach for them in the spring.

[Landscape Maintenance Schedule: HLA 6408](#)