

WINTER CARE FOR YOUR GARDEN TOOLS



SHOVELS, RAKES, AND HOES: Clean, using a wire brush and some soapy water.

After cleaning, dry them thoroughly and store them away. If your tools are dull, sharpen them using a whetstone or a file. Make certain to start at the outer edge of your tool and move toward the center. Remove rust spots with sandpaper or steel wool, then coat the metal portion with vegetable or linseed oil and wipe a light coating of oil on the wooden handles. The oil will help preserve them and prevent cracking and/or splitting. Sometimes an oily sand bucket is used to clean tools. To make an oil and sand bucket, fill a clean, five-gallon bucket with sand and add a quart of oil. Some use motor oil, while others use linseed oil and some prefer an organic alternative such a vegetable oil. To use it, simply dig your tools in and out. The abrasive sand cleans the tool by removing rust and debris and the oil helps to preserve them. An alternative to the oil and sand bucket is to use a five-gallon bucket filled with moderately wet sand. It is used the same way, except the tool must be oiled after use. If you choose, tools can be kept and protected in the bucket of sand all winter. Otherwise, hang with the "working end" up in a dry location.

PRUNERS, PRUNING SAWS, AND LOPPERS: Remove rust with a wire brush and sharpen pruners and loppers with a whetstone. If you have small nicks, remove them with a fine file. Alternatively, save yourself some time by dropping off your pruning saws at a hardware store to have them sharpened for you for a small fee. Some pruners have replaceable parts. In this instance, disassemble, clean and replace any worn out parts. Now that any and all grass, soil, roots, tree bark and any other foreign substance is removed, it is time to pay attention to bacteria, fungi and weed seeds. This is done by disinfecting by immersing in a 2% solution of common household bleach.

MOWERS, TILLERS, CHAIN SAWS, BLOWERS: Run mowers as late in the season as possible in order to use up all of the fuel in the tank and pick up the last bit of fallen leaves. A handy trick is to use a turkey baster to suck out most of the fuel before running it out. Alternatively, you can leave fuel in the machine over winter. If you choose to do so, be sure to add fuel stabilizer according to directions. Avoid storing extra gasoline in containers over the winter as fresh fuel in the spring is always better for the machine. Using a hose and wire brush, remove any caked-up soil, grass and leaves. Check your mower blade for any nicks and chips and sharpen or replace the blade. Make certain to inspect your wheels and height adjuster. Wipe down and oil the mower as necessary. Check the chain on your chainsaw and make certain to either sharpen or replace it and don't forget to change the spark plugs. While it does cost a bit more, it is highly advisable to use 100% gasoline (no ethanol blend) in all small engines. Ethanol can damage some seals and parts over time and attracts moisture/water to the fuel.

SPRAYERS AND SPREADERS: For those used for insect, disease and weed control, simply wash and rinse all parts of the container thoroughly, including the holding tank and nozzle. It may take several times to ensure that the pesticides are totally removed. While you are working with sprayers and spreaders, now would also be a good time to check expiration dates on lawn and garden chemicals, making sure you are complying with manufacturer storage recommendations.

WHEELBARROWS, WAGONS, AND CARTS: Clean the items carefully and, if you find there is chipped paint, try spray painting to prevent rusting in the exposed area. Make certain to grease wheels and axles. For water hoses, make certain to remove kinks to prevent weak points and cracking in the hose. Remove the excess water from your hoses, store in a dry location and on a support or reels loosely to prevent sagging in a dry location.

While this may sound like a lot of work, you will reap the benefits in early spring and be glad that you took the time to prep your tools and added years to their shelf life.