

Winter Tool Prep and Storage

Our trusted gardening tools can take a beating throughout the growing season. Gardeners will all agree that there is nothing more important than the tools they use to keep their gardens well-groomed and looking picture perfect.

As we approach winter, we need to prep our garden tools and equipment to store over the wintry months. Consider the following tips to ensure your tools and equipment are ready for spring:

Clean and Store All Hand Tools

All of your hand tools will require a cleaning prior to being put away. This includes trowels, shovels, rakes, and other hand tools. Thoroughly scrub them with a stiff brush and soapy water. This will ensure all dirt and grime from the season is removed. You will be impressed how well your tools look and it will also extend their life. Leaving dirt and grime on tools will lead to decay and rust which wreaks havoc on wood handles and metal blades. It is also a good idea to use a bit of vegetable or boiled linseed oil on the blades to help keep moisture and rust from forming. Make certain to store tools in a dry area and, if you can hang them up, do so as it will keep tools from collecting excess moisture and the edges sharp.

Sharpen Blades

Sharpen all your blades, including pruners, clippers, shears, shovels, and hoes. Use a file or sharpening stone to make the most of your efforts. Afterwards, add vegetable or boiled linseed oil to coat the metal surfaces of your cutting tools to protect them throughout the harsh winter months. This is also a good time to oil the hinged areas and joints using WD-40 or a 3-in-1 oil to keep these areas loose. Do not use motor oil.

Don't Forget The Power Equipment

We certainly do not want to overlook mowers, string trimmers, and tractors. They all need to be cleaned and prepared for winter as well. Prior to storing them away, consider doing the following:

- Change the oil in all equipment that is gas-powered. Prior to draining oils, allow combustion engines to run a minimum of 15 minutes to

allow any sludge to heat up, become suspended in the oil, and drain out with the oil. This will greatly help protect the engine next year.

- Grease all joints to protect the most exposed parts of equipment so they will not rust over during the winter.
- For mowers, clean the mowing deck. It can get really get caked up with grass clippings, dirt, moss, etc.
- Remove the mowing blade(s) and sharpen it/them.
- Fill the gas tank with fuel and use a fuel stabilizer to prevent the fuel from gumming up and/or collecting moisture over winter months.
- Be sure to disconnect the spark plug wire, replace the spark plug, and add a teaspoon of oil to the engine cylinder.
- Make certain to check the air filters. Replace old paper filters or clean foam filters.
- Examine all the belts and gear drives, looking for signs of overuse, excessive wear, or the need for lubrication.

We generally do not experience extremely harsh winters in our USDA Hardiness Zone (7a). However, it is always recommended that you plan ahead in case we get snow or ice. Make certain to put snow shovels or snow blowers in an area that provides you easy access should you need them. Keep fresh gas and gas stabilizer handy.

Winter can be hard on tools and gardening equipment. There is nothing more important to a gardener than the tools they use, whether it is a favorite shovel, a trusted old tractor, or anything in between. It takes working equipment to get things accomplished in the garden and using these tips can help make the transition to spring a lot easier.