

The Sharpest Tool In The Shed

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Dedicated gardeners in our area have a small window in which they can relax and not fret about what's going on in the dirt. That time is now, but rather than scour the seed catalogs for the umpteenth time, why not check out the condition of your tools?

Too often, our tools are neglected, as they are merely a...uh...tool, designed to make our work easier. Doing work on the tool itself sounds like it defeats the original purpose. Never the less, doing a little work in order to maintain all of those tools will make the big jobs easier.

Keeping your shovel, hoe, loppers, shears and hori hori knife, clean and sharp is the best care you can provide. Your tools will dig and cut with much less muscle work. Inexpensive supplies include; steel wool, wire brush, files, sharpening stone and some oil.

Initially remove any dirt with water (not in the kitchen sink), then, using the wire brush and steel wool, get rid of dirt and rust. Once you have the tool clean (also, tighten nuts on shears and loppers), then you can get at the fun part, sharpening.

Don't let yourself be intimidated by those guys who shave their armpits with an axe, you have real work to do. Most garden tools are single edged, meaning you only have to file or hone the one side. Look for the beveled edge of the correct side. Use a metal file on large tools (including that mower blade), fix tool into a bench clamp or wrestle your legs around it as you sit on the stoop, and go to it. Use a stone on your smaller hand tools once fixed in a vice. (Note; The ARS-type blade on your pruning saw is best replaced, good care of it is not using it in soil).

Once you have a good "edge," coat with oil to protect from more rust. Wooden handles can be lightly sanded and oiled too. Good, safe, and eco-friendly oils include; vegetable oil spray, boiled linseed oil (needs drying time) or camellia oil. Happy honing!

NOTE: Yard and Garden Lectures continue through Feb. A new Master Gardener class begins in February. MG Plant Sale: May 12. Secret Garden: Tour June 16. Info @ county.wsu.edu/Jefferson/gardening

References:

Turnbull, C. 2006. Guide to pruning. 2nd ed. Seattle: Sasquatch Books.

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Mother Earth News; <http://www.motherearthnews.com/Do-It-Yourself/1987-11-01/Tool-Sharpening-Basics.aspx>

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