

West Virginia University

Jefferson County Cooperative Extension Service

Lawn & Garden Tool Care Guide

Principals of tool care and maintenance:

1. Clean your tools and equipment:

- Remove clumps of soil, roots, grass, tree bark and any foreign material from your tools before you put them away. It's a good idea to do this every time you put your tools away, but it's especially important to do this at the end of the growing or mowing season.
- Wire brushes, garden hoses and sand buckets all have a place in keeping tools clean.
- Dirt is not the only enemy of your tools, bacteria, fungi and weed seeds can all hitch a ride between plants, gardens and lawns if proper care is not taken to clean equipment of debris and disinfect trimming and pruning tools.
- Disinfect cutting tools with a 2% solution of household bleach after each plant.
- Tighten screws, sand away splinters and replace cracked or broken handles.



Sand bucket + motor oil

2. Sharpen cutting edges:

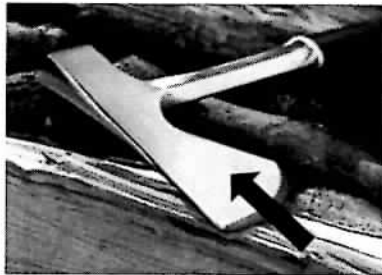
- Cutting tools become dull with regular use even under ideal conditions.
- Poor hygiene, infrequent sharpening, a lack of oil or improper use can all speed up the dulling process.
- Never use the wrong tool for the job.
- Never cut soil or metal with fine shears or knives and never cut objects to larger for a particular tool.
- Periodically inspect all blades for damage and wear.
- Sharpen or replace dull or damaged blades.
- A restored working edge on an old hoe, shovel or spade restores utility and extends the tools lifespan.



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3. How to sharpen garden tools:

- Place all blades or tools in a vice and always wear gloves when sharpening axes, shears, pruning tools and loppers.
- 8 to 10 inch mill files works great to sharpen hoes and shovels.
- Use a hand grinder to reshape abused tools by resurfacing their edge to 70°.
- After reshaping the cutting edge of a hoe, sharpen at an angle of approximately 45°.
- After reshaping the cutting edge of a shovel, sharpen at an angle of approximately 45°.
- Minimize use of electrical devices when sharpening fine cutting edges as they produce excess heat and destroy the temper in steel.
- Sharpen axes with a file going toward the ax head, creating a 25° edge; finish with a whetstone in a circular motion toward the edge.



- For various trimmers, shears, pruning tools and loppers, the blade design dictates the sharpening technique. Follow the manufacturer's directions to restore a quality cutting edge.
- If you have to do more than lightly file along the existing contour of a lawnmower blade to sharpen it, you should replace it or get it sharpened professionally.
- Lawnmower blades must be balanced and extensive grinding without rebalancing the blade could cause serious safety issues.
- There is an excellent assortment of knife and shear sharpening tools available at most sporting goods and hardware stores. These tools are fast and effective means of sharpening knives and shears.

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4. Oil moving or exposed parts:

- Oil hinges, springs and gears when necessary.
- Change oil in mowers and garden tillers every spring.
- Oil blades and exposed metallic parts before you put them away for the year.
- Maintain wooden handles by treating them with new paint, linseed oil or a preservative.



<http://fyi.uwex.edu/cwas/files/2010/10/Maintenance-Lawn-and-Garden-Tools1.pdf>

5. Prepare for winter:

- In late fall you should clean air filters, empty fuel tanks or add a stabilizer to the fuel before storing your equipment in a dry secure location for winter.
- Hand tools should also be stored in dry locations.
- Consider using oil sand buckets for winter storage of shovels, hoes and axes.
- Securely store leftover fertilizer until spring.
- Check expiration dates on lawn and garden chemicals and follow the manufactures recommendations for storage.



6. Organize:

- Think of the end of season as an opportunity to organize your garden and lawn tool life.
- Develop and implement storage and maintenance plans for your tools and toys.
- Plan for next year to be your best growing season yet.

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7. Oil and sand bucket:

- A sand bucket is a low-cost storage and maintenance technique.
- Sand buckets are a rust simple prevention tool.
- Sand buckets help removes rust from old neglected digging tools.
- A sand bucket is a 5 gallon bucket filled with sand and oil to clean and polish tools.
- Sand buckets work by cleaning and oiling your digging tools every time you insert or remove them from the bucket.

<http://www.lsuagcenter.com/mcms/webtools/image.aspx?Watermark=ZABIAGYAYQB1AGwAdAA=&ResourcePath=/NR/rdonlyres/678EE92F-8193-4F4F-B43C-8D40BF9B5A7C/1256/Rlp124.JPG>



We recommend you use a new bucket or one free of chemical residues.

8. How to make an oil and sand bucket:

- You start with a clean metal or sturdy plastic 5 gallon bucket.
- You fill your bucket $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ full of dry sand and add a quart of oil. Mineral oil or motor oil works best. Vegetable oils will work but they can become rancid and unpleasant.
- Clean the dirt from your tools, allow them to dry, then “dig” them into the sand bucket.
- As you dig into the sand it scrapes away surface rust and the oil prevents new rust from forming.
- You can place several tools in one bucket.

9. Alternative sand bucket:

- You can make an alternative sand bucket to clean dirty and muddy digging tools.
- Fill a bucket $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ full of moderately wet sand
- To clean your digging tools simply “dig” them into the sand. This will remove mud and dirt from your tools. Replace the sand when it becomes ineffective due to the accumulation of mud and dirt in the sand.
- After cleaning your tools in sand, rinse them with water to remove any sand
- As a final step, dry your tools and apply a thin film or lubricant such as motor oil, mineral oil or WD40.
- Store your tools in a dry location until you need them again.

References

- Eckelberg, J. 2011. Maintenance and care of lawn and garden tools. University of Washington Extension Service. <http://fyi.uwex.edu/cwas/files/2010/10/Maintenance-Lawn-and-Garden-Tools1.pdf>
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