

Garden Tool Care

Garden tool maintenance is an on going function of good gardening. Just as no one wants to be known; as not being the sharpest tool in the shed, a dull, poorly maintained garden tool will cause you to do more work and disseminates diseases.

The **lawn mower** is in most homes the biggest perpetrator. A dirty lawn mower under carriage disseminates the disease from your last use or from its last lawn. Dull blades will cause the leaf blades of your lawn to be torn instead of being cut cleanly. This slows the healing process; weakens the plant and allows for much easier access to disease.

A weakened unhealthy plant is much more susceptible to the ravages of insects. For example: we see healthy actively growing lawns maintaining it's own against the feeding of the white grubs. The lawn when stressed by poor gardening practices or environmental factors succumbs to the voracious appetites of the white grubs.

Keep your lawn mower clean of debris and the blades sharpened. The underside of the lawnmower deck should be cleaned regularly to prevent the build up of grass clippings. The chlorophyll will also build up on the cutting edges of the blades. This acts to give a poor cut and spreads diseases right into the open wounds of the leaf blades. Do not forget the treads on the lawn mower's wheels they must be clean too! After removing all of the debris a good wipe down with soapy water is a good idea. Allow the lawn mower to air dry. Never put it away wet. Keep the wheels lubricated year round.

Lawn mower blades must be sharpened and balanced each Spring. During the cutting season the blade should be given a cleaning and a light sharpening after about every six to ten uses. Keep your lawn mower maintenance in check with our **Lawn Mower Tools**. Sharpen the blades with a fine metal file or a Coarse Flat Diamond File.

Secateurs or **hand pruners** should be sharpened each spring. When sharpening the blades sharpen only the cutting blade. This blade is only sharpened on the beveled side. The thin bright edge is the only part of the blade that the Tapered Diamond File touches. The width of the Bright edge is maintained by holding the file at a 20-degree angle to the blade. This maintains the strength and cutting integrity of the blade. All sharpening is done in a smooth stroke moving away from your body. At the end of the stroke lift the Diamond File and set it down on the end closest to your body and move the Diamond File away in one smooth stroke. Repeat until the blade is sharp. You can run once the Tapered Diamond File along the backside of the blade to remove any burrs created during the sharpening of the beveled side. Lubrication of the pruner's pivotal parts will reduce the resistance you will experience while pruning. Lubricate the pivotal bolt with olive oil, mineral oil or **Bahco Eco-Lube**. The secateurs or hand pruners should be kept tightened. The bolt that holds the two halves of the pruner together is tightened so the blades still pass by each other easily but with no light appearing between the two blades. If after the proper tightening some light can still be seen between the two blades then the blades are warped. Warped secateurs or hand pruners are ruined. Never use warped tools.

Note: Secateurs or hand pruners should always be sized to comfortably fit the operator's hand.

Knives are similar in their care to Secateurs and hand pruners. They can be washed in soapy water and hand dried. If the build up of the natural plant oils gets ahead of you or you are pruning evergreens then clean the blades with **Sap-X**. Next determine if your knife blade is single sided, double side or serrated. Serrated knives are sharpened with a Round Diamond File. As you sharpen you maintain the angles and the width of the bright edges. Single sided knife blades are sharpened on the beveled edge side only. The Medium Flat Diamond File is held at an angle to maintain the angle of the bevel and the width of the bright edge. Then using the Fine Flat Diamond File lightly put a fine finishing edge on the blade. All sharpening is done in a smooth stroke moving away from your body. At the end of the stroke lift the Diamond File and set it down on the end closest to your body and move the Diamond File away in one smooth stroke. Repeat until the blade is sharp. Using the Fine Flat Diamond File make one pass on the backside of the blade to remove any burrs created by your sharpening. The Double Edge knife is sharpened in a similar fashion to the single edge knife blade. Using the same Flat Diamond Files sharpen each side of the double-edged knife blade.

The **Hedge Shears** and Grass Shears are sharpened using the Course Diamond File followed by the Medium Diamond File maintaining the angle and width of the bright edge. By maintaining the angle and width of the bright edge you will maintain the blades strength and structural integrity. Wavy bladed Hedge shears are sharpened with the Round Diamond File all the while you are maintaining the angle and width of the bright edge. Lubricate the pivotal bolt with olive oil, mineral oil or Bahco Eco- Lube. Keep your hedge shears and grass shears clean with soapy water and dry by hand. If the build up of the natural plant oils gets ahead of you or you are pruning evergreens then clean the blades with Sap-X.

Loppers should be sharpened each spring or after a period of extended use. When sharpening the blades, sharpen only the cutting blade. This blade is only sharpened on the beveled side. The thin bright edge is the only part of the blade that the Tapered Diamond File touches. The width of the bright edge is maintained by holding the file at a 20-degree angle to the blade. This maintains the strength and cutting integrity of the blade. All sharpening is done in a smooth stroke moving away from your body. At the end of the stroke lift the Tapered Diamond File and set it down on the end closest to your body. Again move the Tapered Diamond File away in one smooth stroke. Repeat until the blade is sharp. You can run the Tapered Diamond File once along the backside of the blade to remove any burrs created during your sharpening of the other side. Lubrication of the lopper's pivotal parts will reduce the resistance you will experience while pruning. Lubricate the pivotal bolt with olive oil, mineral oil or Bahco Eco- Lube. The loppers should be kept tightened. The bolt that holds the two halves of the lopper together is tightened so that the blades still pass by each other easily but with no light appearing between the two blades. If after the proper tightening light can still be seen between the two blades then the blades are warped and lopper is ruined. Never use warped tools. Loppers that have a ratcheting or a leverage assist system must be lubricated regularly. Use olive oil mineral oil or Bahco Eco-Lube. If you over stress these loppers you may break the ratcheting or leverage assist systems.

Note: The longer the handles of a lopper the more likely you are to twist the handles during pruning and warp the head. Loppers should always be sized to comfortably fit the operator's size, strength and the operation at hand.

Hand Saws are usually placed in two categories Hard Point and Fileable. Hard Point Saws are disposable and Fileable blades can be sharpened with a file. Hard Point saws can cut four times longer than a Fileable Saw blade before becoming dull. You can tell the difference between the two types of saw blades because the Fileable Saw blades have bright silver or metal colour teeth. On the other hand the Hard Point Saw Blade will have dark blue or black coloured teeth caused by their heat treatment. To sharpen the Fileable blades place them in a vice with the teeth up. Hold the file firmly with one hand while with the other hand grip the other end to steady and guide the file. Hold it in a horizontal position. Always move your whole body position as you move down the saw blade as you are sharpening. Apply two to three light to medium pressure strokes per tooth. Always file one side of the teeth over the entire length of the saw while moving the blade position in the vice to minimize its vibrations. Next turn your body position to angle the file to sharpen the other side of the teeth along the entire side of the blade. Turn the blade around in the vice and repeat the procedures.

Shovels, Spades, Forks and Hoes. If they are kept clean and reasonably sharp they work better. Each of these should have a Coarse Flat Diamond File run over their cutting edges. They are not honed to cutting edge but to a thick strong sharp edge that will cut roots as they penetrate the soil. To clean these tools wash them with soapy water. Hand dry them or allow them to dry in the warm sun. Tools with wooden handles over time will have the protective lacquer layer wear down. You can lightly sand them down and apply another layer of a lacquer or a sealer. The traditional method of dealing with this is to sand away the remaining lacquer and apply to the wooden handle boiled linseed oil. This is rubbed in and allowed to dry between applications. **Caution:** These oily rags are susceptible to spontaneous combustion.

Short Term and Long Term Storage:

Short-term storage of tools should be second nature for good gardeners. This is simply put them away where they belong clean, and dry. Soap and water works wonders for doing this. If necessary they can be lubricated with olive oil mineral oil or **Bahco Eco-Lube**. The long-term storage of tools starts just like the short-term storage of your tools but all their metal parts are wiped down with olive oil mineral oil or **Bahco Eco-Lube**.

Here though it is best to hang your garden tools high where there is some warmth and air movement. Pegging them on a garage wall achieves these conditions very well. There is another great advantage to pegging them on a wall and that is if there is a missing tool you will know it instantly.

Gloves: As a young man I thought gloves were for wimps. Today we know better. We must protect our hands from the sun, wind, and cold. We must also protect our hands from the ravages of soil borne pathogens and the cuts and scraps that would allow them easy access. A good well-fitted pair(s) of gloves is a necessary tool in gardening. Gloves while protecting us can also disseminate insects, their eggs, soil borne diseases and viruses. Come to think of it so can dirty foot coverings and clothing. Always select gloves that can be washed and if possible machined dried. **West County Water Proof Gloves** are great for autumn and spring gardening. Lightweight Work Gloves are good for easy gardening while the more rugged gloves such as **West County Landscape gloves** are for more aggressive gardeners. The West County Landscape glove with its extra padding in the palm will provide a cushion for the sensitive pressure points in your hands. For those of you with the thornier task of Rose and Barberry care then you may wish to get a pair of Armor Gloves. Badly worn or torn gloves while a gardening fashion faux pas also do not provide good protection and should be replaced immediately