

Garden Tools Maintenance Checklist

By Tara Schatz

Everyday Maintenance

- Remove soil and dirt from your tools.** Use a garden trowel to loosen caked-on dirt and give them a spray with the hose.
- Oil your cutting tools.** Keep your loppers, shears, and pruners sharp and at the ready. At the end of each use, wipe them down with a dry rag, then give them a spray of penetrating oil like WD-40.
- Prevent rust.** Fill a five-gallon bucket with sand, followed by a quart of vegetable oil. When you are finished in the garden, plunge your clean shovels and hoes into the sand several times. You can even store your shovels right in the oily sand.
- Store your tools in a shed or garage.** Do not leave them out in the sun and rain. They will deteriorate very quickly.

Springtime Maintenance

- Sharpen your tools.** Sharp tools make all the difference. Here's what you'll need to keep them cutting.
 - Wire brush and steel wool.** Use these first to remove stubborn dirt and rust.
 - Whetstone for sharpening pruners.** Drip a few drops of oil onto the stone and with a curved motion, rub the sharp edge of the cutting blade against the stone.
 - Various files for sharpening shovels and hoes.** These are called bastard files and come in many sizes. Start with medium grit and move onto fine grit as the sharpening progresses. Secure your tool in a vise for safety. Push the file across the blade and away from your body at a 45 degree angle.
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- Lubricate your tools.** Once your tools are sharp and at the ready, give them a spray with vegetable oil.
- Tune up your lawn mower**
 - Replace the spark plug, oil, and filter.** Use the manufacturer's guidelines for instructions specific to your mower.
 - Sharpen the blade.** Remove the blade and sharpen as detailed for shovels and hoes above. Before you reattach the blade to your mower, check the balance to make sure both sides are weighted equally.
 - Fill with gas.** Be sure to use ethanol-free gas to extend the life of your mower.
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- Fall maintenance**
 - Examine your tools.** If cared for properly, your garden tools will last a lifetime, but it's still wise to check your tools at the end of the season to see if any need replacing.
 - Maintain your tool handles.** First sand your handles with medium-grit sandpaper to get rid of splinters. Then, coat liberally with linseed oil to preserve the wood throughout the winter.
 - Put away your hoses.** If you live in an area that sees freezing temperatures, you must drain your hoses before the cold weather sets in. Store them in the garage for the winter to help prolong their life.
 - Run your mower dry.** Gasoline does not overwinter well. Either use your mower for mulching fall leaves, or run it dry before storing it for the winter.