

Take care of your garden tools and they will take care of you! Well, that's easy to say but if you're like most people, the last thing you want to do after a day of gardening is clean shovels.

Seriously, well-maintained tools will last longer and make your gardening work easier. After every use, clean, as described below, and store them off bare ground away from moisture.

1. Use a stiff-bristled brush to remove dirt.
2. If necessary, follow up with a damp rag, then dry the tool.
3. If there is a heavy buildup of sap or similar gunk, scrape with a paint scraper or sharp chisel while taking care not to gouge the metal. Clean with alcohol or household foaming bathroom cleaner. Follow up with fine steel wool.
4. If rust remains, clean it away with a wire brush, steel wool or sandpaper.
5. When the blade is clean, wipe the surface with a lightly oiled rag. Do not use any petroleum based oil. You'll just end up transferring that oil to the garden soil. Use boiled linseed oil or any natural product such as vegetable or olive oil. The purpose of the oil is to create a barrier between the metal and oxygen/water that creates rust.
6. Wooden parts should have rough spots or splinters trimmed off and sanded smooth. Maintain a coating of linseed or mineral oil.
7. You can sharpen with a range of tools, but most gardeners find that a flat file will work well. Wear eye protection and some heavy gloves to prevent metal splinters getting in your eyes or under your skin and to prevent cuts from your newly sharpened tools. This work can sometimes be dangerous and tricky. The garden tool should be firmly secured and the sharpening must be done at the correct angle. There are professional

services available. If you are inexperienced at sharpening, we recommend hiring such a professional.

**At a community garden**, aim for 1 & 2 above after each gardening session. The remaining steps should be done at least once a year.

**Check out these videos:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1KSqC1yEeU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vice3CYMBX>

**At the end of the season**, If you've cleaned your garden tools – great! If you're like most of us, . . . Well, better get busy.

Tools need to be clean and sterile, so they don't accidentally spread disease or viruses to other plants or soil. Clean tools will last longer as well.

Start by scrubbing your tools with a wire brush. This is the fastest and best way to remove dirt.



Use vinegar to remove rust. Let the tools soak for 24 hours to absorb the vinegar. Scrub with a stiff-bristle brush or wipe with a microfibre cloth. Then sterilize, using one of the methods below.

You don't need to spend big money on sterilizing solutions. Some common household items will work nicely.

**Isopropyl Alcohol** – Tools can simply be wiped, sprayed or dipped in isopropyl alcohol for immediate effectiveness against most pathogens. Most experts recommend alcohol for sterilizing garden tools.

**Bleach** – mixed at a ratio of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water. Soak the tool's blades in the bleach water for thirty minutes, then rinse and dry. The problem with bleach is that it gives off harmful fumes and may damage the metal, rubber and plastic of some tools in time.

**Household Cleaners** – Lysol, Pine Sol and Listerine are sometimes used. However, the effectiveness of these products on plant pathogens has not been scientifically determined.

Wipe the metal parts of pruners, shears, and loppers with an oily rag to improve lubrication and guard against rust.

During gardening season, even when you know you'll be using your tools the next day, do not leave them out in the elements. After cleaning, return them to the shed, where they will be kept dry and are more likely to remain rust-free.