



## ***10-Minute University™***

*Oregon Master Gardener™ Association – Clackamas County Chapter  
In Cooperation with Oregon State University Extension Service*



# Care and Maintenance of Garden Tools

Tools deteriorate from time and dampness combined with soil and rust. Proper cleaning and care described below will keep them in good working condition and extend their life.

## **Storage**

Store tools in a clean, dry place. Tools can be stored on shelves or in racks, or simply leaned up against a wall. Do not store tools that have wooden parts with the wood in contact with soil or concrete. Clean thoroughly and restore handle finishes before storing over the winter.

## **Care during the Gardening Season**

For shovels, hoes, forks and other long-handled metal tools, keep a 5-gallon bucket 4/5 full of sand, with (optionally) about a quart of car engine oil thoroughly mixed into it. After each day's use plunge the tool into the bucket a few times to help clean the blade and coat it with oil. Remove and wipe with a lightly oiled rag.

## **Winter Storage**

Give tools a good cleaning before storing them for the winter. Scrape off soil, using a stiff wire brush if necessary. Remove rust with sandpaper. After cleaning, give metal surfaces a protective coating such as WD-40 or clean lightweight motor oil.

## **Step-by-step Instructions for Thorough Cleaning**

Keep tools clean and sharp – well-maintained tools make work easier and more enjoyable. After every use, clean off any dirt or rust. Clean the entire tool including blades, handle(s), etc.

1. Use a brush to clean off any dirt, then a dry rag.
2. If necessary, follow up with a damp rag, then dry the tool.
3. If there is a heavy buildup of sap, scrape with a paint scraper or sharp chisel while taking care not to gouge the metal. Clean with alcohol, mineral spirits (paint thinner) or household foaming bathroom cleaner. Follow up with fine steel wool.
4. If rust remains, clean away with a wire brush and/or sandpaper.
5. When the blade is clean, wipe all metal surfaces with a lightly oiled rag.
6. Wooden parts should have any rough spots or splinters cleaned up by trimming off and sanding smooth. Maintain a coating of linseed or mineral oil.

## **Step-by-step Instructions for Adjusting the Blades**

For two-bladed cutting tools, sometimes the blades are sharp but the tool won't cut. If your pruners are sharp but the object cut is not smooth, tears or leaves a little heel, your pruner is out of alignment. Examine the tool for loose parts. Close the handles and look for space between the blades. If the blades are misaligned, loose, or bent, the tool must be disassembled for adjustments.

1. Secure the tool well, with the pivot point exposed, and both the head of the bolt and the nut accessible. A good bench vise will help, but a stout table with clamps will do. It is important that the tool is securely held, as force will be exerted from varying angles during disassembly and reassembly, and if the tool moves severe injury can result.

2. You may need to free-up rusted bolts first. Apply WD-40, Liquid Wrench, or another penetrating liquid, following label instructions.
3. Using wrenches, screwdrivers, or other appropriate tools, remove the pivot bolt. Be certain to note the location and alignment of any washers or spacers. Some may be cupped to place pressure on other parts of the assembly, so make note of the direction of the cupping for later reassembly. In some cases there is a lock nut or other device to keep the nut from turning. If so, loosen and remove this first. In some cases the nut is permanently fastened to one blade, but usually it is free. *NOTE: some pivot bolts are left-hand threaded (tightening counter-clockwise). These will usually have an arrow on the head of the bolt that shows the direction to turn to loosen the bolt.*
4. Check for bent parts and straighten or replace as necessary.
5. Thoroughly clean all parts, including the inside surfaces of the bolt holes, the bolt and the nut.
6. Using light machine oil (e.g. 3-in-1 Oil), lubricate the bolt, bolt holes and the base of both blades around the bolt holes.
7. Reassemble, first slipping the bolt into the blade. If the bolt is threaded into the blade, tighten it firmly. Or, it may be keyed, and will only go in when aligned to a slot in the blade. Be certain to place any washers on the bolt as they were before.
8. Assemble the other blade and any washers or other parts in the order and alignment they were in before disassembly.
9. Tighten the nut onto the bolt. At this point you should not be able to open the tool easily. Begin to loosen the bolt in short increments. Imagine the face of a clock. Start with a five-minute increment. Remove the tool from the clamp or vise and check its operation. Do this repeatedly until the blades are beginning to pass. Now reduce your increments to one-minute size. When you are in adjustment, the blades will pass smoothly and easily without wobbling.
10. Work the tool a few times, and then give it a final wipe to remove excess oil and coat exposed metal surfaces with oil.

### **Additional information**

The following are just a few of the OSU Publications available online at

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog>

*Practical Tools for the Vegetable Gardener*

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/practical-tools-vegetable-gardener>

*Take Good Care of Hard-working Garden Tools*

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/take-good-care-hard-working-garden-tools>

*Sharpening Your Garden Tools*

[http://extension.oregonstate.edu/benton/sites/default/files/sharpgdn\\_insights2012.pdf](http://extension.oregonstate.edu/benton/sites/default/files/sharpgdn_insights2012.pdf)

### **Master Gardener™ advice**

- Call Home Horticulture Helpline: 503-655-8631 (Clackamas County), 503-821-1150 (Washington County), or 503-445-4608 (Multnomah County).
- For 10-Minute University™ handouts and class schedule, visit [www.metromastergardeners.org](http://www.metromastergardeners.org).
- Look for Master Gardeners at area Farmers' Markets.

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