

**Community Horticulture Fact Sheet #100
Tool Care**

WHY CLEAN TOOLS?

- Cleaning extends the life of a tool by removing moisture-laden, rust-enhancing soil from steel surfaces.
- Cleaning tools after each use keeps diseases, fungi, insect eggs and weed seeds from being spread around the garden.
- Clean, sharp tools are easier to use and take less effort on the part of the gardener.

HOW TO CARE FOR TOOLS

Tools that come into contact with soil should be cleaned with a steady spray of water from the garden hose. Some scrubbing may be necessary. After washing, dry the tool with a rag.

To prevent rust on steel tool heads, apply oil. Use 30W motor oil. You can either wipe the oil onto the steel surface with a clean rag or put the motor oil into a spray bottle and apply it that way. CAUTION – Store the oil away from heat sources and dispose of it and oily rags properly. Make sure you label the container in which you store the oil.

Remove light rust with a sheet of 80-grit sandpaper. Use a stiff wire brush for slightly heavier coats of rust. Always apply oil to newly cleaned steel.

Keep a nice sharp edge on your shovels, spades, hoes and trowels. You will need an 8"-long mill file with a bastard cut (its teeth are fairly coarse). A file with a handle will be

easier to hold and use. For the best results, hold the tool steady in a clamp or vise. Draw the cutting teeth in one direction over the edge being sharpened.

Mark your garden tools with bright paint or surveyor's ribbon, so that they are easy to find when you lay them down.

Store your tools where they will stay dry and be easily accessible. Store sharp tools where small children can't reach them.

GARDENING TOOL SAFETY

Don't leave tools lying around. Someone could trip on them or step on them and get injured. When you set a tool aside while gardening, placed it upright, out of the way, with the blade or tines facing away from passersby. If you need to put your garden tool down flat, place points or blade face down.

Use tools that fit you. A tool that's too heavy will be difficult to handle and one that's too short could cause back strain.

Keep tool ends low to the ground to minimize the chance of hurting someone. Children especially must be taught this rule.

Inspect your tools before and after you use them to make sure they are not in need of repair.

Shovel Use Work with the shovel close to your body, no more than a foot away. Hold the shovel handle, so the blade is directed straight down. Your arms and elbows should

be held out straight. Drive the shovel blade to its full depth by placing your foot on the tread and shifting your weight to that foot. Step back, keep your back straight and pull the handle toward your chest or shoulder. You shouldn't have to bend at all to break the ground.

Keeping your back straight, bend your knees, drop your rear and slide your bottom hand as far down the handle as it can go comfortably. Using your legs, lift the blade as you rise and rotate your torso in the direction you plan to toss the soil. Keep the shovel near your body and pitch the dirt to where you want it.

Take small bites with your shovel. Your body will use less effort and the smaller "bites" will shatter just from being thrown or turned.

Hoe & Rake Use – Stand as erect as possible to hoe and rake. Start by standing sideways to your work. Grasp the hoe with your thumbs toward the blade and keep your back as straight as you can.

Wheel barrow and Cart Use – For both wheelbarrows and carts, don't carry a heavier load than you can push comfortably. Be careful on inclines, a heavily loaded wheelbarrow or cart can easily push or pull you downhill. Be careful to keep the load balanced in a wheelbarrow, otherwise it may tip over. If the load shifts and the wheelbarrow becomes difficult to control, just let it tip. You could strain your back or other muscles by trying to keep it upright.

WAYS TO PREPARE AND CARE FOR YOUR BODY WHILE GARDENING

Your body is your most important tool. We need to learn how to take care of ourselves before and while we are gardening. Gardening is a good form of exercise. It can improve your health and your strength, endurance and flexibility. Gardening gives a moderate workout. You burn about 159 calories every 30 minutes, the same number of calories as brisk walking.

Remember to put on sunscreen, to drink an adequate amount of fluids, and to wear protective clothing, i.e. hats, shoes and gloves, when needed.

Try to use your leg muscles more than your back.

Change the type of activity you are doing about every half-hour or take frequent breaks. As you start to garden, stretch to warm up. Repeat as needed during breaks.

- **NECK STRETCHES** – Bend your head to chest and hold briefly. Bend your head backwards. Look right, then left. Try to touch your ear to your shoulder without lifting your shoulder.
- **SHOULDER STRETCHES** – Shrug your shoulders, lifting them as high and lowering them as low as you can. Hold your arms out to the side and make circles, clockwise and then counter clockwise. Make big circles, then gradually smaller circles.
- **WRIST STRETCHES** – Make circles with wrists, first one way and then the other. Bend wrists up and down. Repeat.
- **BACK STRETCHES** – Bend over with legs straight reaching for your toes. When you feel a pull, stop and hold. Repeat.