

Slug: Ask the Master Gardener
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Here are a few different tips that just might make your gardening a bit easier.

Keep your tools clean and sharp. Sharp hoes and pruners save time and sore muscles.

Right tool for the right job. If bending or kneeling is difficult use long-handled or curved-handled tools. They are easier to hold and easier on the body. Use a stool or chair. Sit instead of kneeling or bending or squatting.

Don't waste time looking for your tool. Paint the handles a bright color, one that is easy to spot not one that can blend in with the camouflage of your garden. This way you can spot them because they will stick out like a sore thumb. You can also use long-handled tools as measuring sticks by marking them for feet and inches along the handle. Either notch or paint the inch and feet marks and you have a measuring tool when you need one.

Glue or tape an old mirror to the end of an old mop or broom handle. Use it to look under leaves for insects instead of bending or kneeling.

When pruning roses or other thorny bushes, try using oven mitts instead of regular gardening gloves. This gives hands and arms a bit of extra protection.

Don't throw away that old plastic laundry basket. Take it into the garden and use it when you are gathering vegetables. That way you can hose them off outside and not mess the kitchen sink. An old colander works well also. An old mailbox in the garden can be attractively decorated and makes a great place to store your trowel, shears and other small gardening tools and your gloves. Take that old pillow you no longer use and put it into a heavy duty plastic bag. It makes a much softer kneeler than some hard rubber ones do, and it keeps your jeans cleaner also.

Do you have a hose with a mind of its own? When trying to coil or to straighten it out, it kinks and twists wrong? Leave the water on and you will find it much easier to coil or straighten, when done just turn off the water and drain the hose.

Those white plastic knives we use on picnics and BBQ's make great row markers in the garden. Use a permanent marking pen on the flat blade then push the handle down in the ground.

Don't forget to water-----yourself. Working in the garden is hard work and the sun just makes you sweat more. Be sure to keep your self hydrated and plain old water is the best for you. So be sure to take that water bottle with you and drink when you are dry. Hopefully some of these tips will help you to enjoy your gardening. Happy gardening.

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This column is written by Washington State University/Skagit County certified Master Gardeners. Questions may be submitted to WSU/Skagit County Cooperative Extension, 306 S. First Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-3805.