

Cleaning and Sharpening Garden Tools

Clean tools work more effectively and extend the life of the tool. Cleaning tools helps prevent rust from forming, keeps edges sharp and removes disease-laden soil and sap. Ideally a tool should be disinfected after working on every plant, however this may not be practical. An alternative to disinfect between each plant is to rotate between several tools, while working in the garden.

Supplies:

Steel wool

Disinfectant

Soap and water

Lubricant

File or wet stone

1. Start with a good cleaning

Tools such as shovels and hoes can be cleaned with a forceful stream of water. For stubborn soil use a wire -bristle brush or steel wool, then dry with a rag.

Small tools can be soaked in soapy water (1/2 teaspoon dishwashing liquid per gallon of water). Rinse and dry with clean rag

Sticky plant sap can be removed with paint thinner or Goo Gone on a rag. Check for rust. If rust is present, use a stiff wire brush or steel wool to scrub away rust spots. Lightly coat the tool with vegetable oil to aid in loosening rust as you scrub.

Disinfect tools with alcohol, (ethanol or isopropyl). It can be used as a wipe or dip them in solution of 70-100% alcohol. You do not need to rinse it off. It is immediately effective. TSP (Trisodium phosphates can be used, but note, it is corrosive. Mix a 10% solution (1 part TSP to 9 parts water). Soak for at least 3 minutes.

2. Sharpen pruners

Sharpen blades by following the bevel on the blade, holding it at the same angle as the beveled cutting edge. Start at the inside of the

blade, draw the file toward the tip in a curved motion that follows the shape of the blades. Finish by removing burrs you may feel with your finger by running the extra fine file over the back side of the blades a few times.

3. Lubricate

Finish with an application of dry or silicone-based lubricant. You can also lightly coat blades with vegetable or olive oil.

Submitted by Cheryl Gedris