

Proper cleaning and care will extend a tool's life, but more importantly, keep them in good working order and make them easier to use.

Storage

Store tools in a clean, dry place. It is not necessary to hang them, but you may conserve space by doing so. Clean thoroughly before storing.

Cleaning

1. Cleaning Supplies

- a. The Tool Cleaning Bucket - Fill a 5-gallon bucket 4/5 full of sand, with (optionally) about a quart of car engine oil thoroughly mixed into it. For a non-petroleum option use Linseed Oil – but it is much more expensive. Do not use other types of oil because they will become rancid in the heat.
- b. Putty Knife
- c. Steel Wool
- d. Sandpaper
- e. Wire Brush
- f. Rags
- g. WD-40 or other light machine or motor oil.

2. Cleaning Techniques

- a. Clean the entire tool (including handles) thoroughly after every use with a stiff wire brush, putty knife, or sandpaper.
- b. Remove rust with steel wool or sandpaper
- c. Once clean, plunge the tool into the tool cleaning bucket then use a rag with a bit of the sand grit to finish cleaning and polishing the tool. Make sure entire tool is wiped lightly with the oily rag.
- d. If you will be storing the tool for more than a week before using again, spray the metal surfaces with WD-40 or other lightweight machine or motor oil.
- e. If cleaning with water, follow up by drying the tool with an oily rag to prevent rust.
- f. If there is a heavy buildup of sap, scrape as much off as possible without gouging the metal, then use alcohol, mineral spirits (paint thinner) or household foaming bathroom cleaner for the remainder. Follow up with fine steel wool. Coat lightly with oil to finish.
- g. Trim splinters from wooden handles and use sandpaper to smooth. Follow up with linseed or mineral oil. Motor oil can be used but it tends to dry out the wood.

Sharpening

1. Sharpening supplies

- a. Tools
 - i. Whetstone
 - ii. Sharpening steel (use the one from the kitchen!)
 - iii. Bastard Grade mill file
- b. Lubricants
 - i. WD-40 or other light machine oil
 - ii. White Lithium Grease
- c. Rags
- d. Tool bench, table, or shop vise, clamps, vice grips as needed.

2. Adjusting the Blades

- a. Most manufacturers have online resources to show you how to disassemble and sharpen your tools.
- b. Examine the tool to make sure it is in alignment and that there are no loose parts. You may need to disassemble to adjust.
- c. Secure the tool well and expose the head of the bolt and nut. A bench vise makes this easier but a flat surface and clamps (or vice grips) can be used instead.
- d. Spray the bolt with WD-40 or other lubricant to help loosen.
- e. Keep track of the order you are disassembling for easier assembly later.
- f. Thoroughly clean all parts, including the inside surfaces of the bolt holes, the bolt and the nut.
- g. Use White Lithium grease to lubricate the bolt, bolt holes, and nuts.

3. Sharpening – Maintaining the angle

- a. Sharpening is the act of removing metal from the blade to restore the cutting edge. The edge is usually referred to as the ‘bevel’.
- b. Try to maintain the same bevel (angle) as when the tool was new. If you make the edge too blunt, the blade will not cut well; if you make the blade angle too sharp, the edge of the blade will be weak and you will wear away most of the blade with just a few uses in the garden.
- c. Most sharpening angles are 20° to 25°. Determine this by holding your file across the blade perpendicular to it. That will make a 90-degree angle. Now turn the file downward 1/2 the distance to the blade. That is 45 degrees. Now turn it 1/2 the remaining distance again. That is about 22.5 degrees, which gets you to where you can begin sharpening.
- d. Use long strokes against the stone, file or steel. Do not “saw” the blade.
- e. If using a whetstone, push the blade away from your body to sharpen, using a “up and over” stroke
- f. If using a file, push it away from your body along the tool edge, using the same angled “up and over” stroke.
 - i. Note: files are to be used in only one direction. The teeth are designed to cut only on the down or push stroke. Raise the file slightly as you bring it back. Trying to cut material on the backstroke using a “sawing” motion will quickly ruin the file's teeth. Resources

Resources

Bladed tools: <https://www.familyhandyman.com/tools/how-to-sharpen-garden-tools/step-by-step>

Hand Pruners: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBnyrFwxmfY>

Felco Hand Pruners: https://www.felco.com/us_en/service/index/maintenance

Hoes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nERyQeFtc8>

Shovels: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vice3CYMBXg>

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