

Confessions of a Reckless Garden Tool Owner and How She Changed Her Careless Ways

by Kathy Petreré

I must be one of the worst offenders when it comes to tool maintenance. But after having to pay to have my small tiller "fixed" – not working *only* because I hadn't maintained it – I'm changing my ways.

This fall, my hardworking garden tools are going to get the royal treatment they deserve.

Cleaning your garden tools is one of the most important tasks you can do this fall. Cleaning them *regularly* makes end-of-season chores a whole lot easier. (See, I'm learning.)

Having a relatively clean, dry place to store tools makes them ready for next year. Letting them sit dirty, un-oiled and unsharpened in a bucket outside doesn't work nearly as well.

Scrub-A-Dub-Dub

A grill scrubber and/or a wire brush will remove the worst dirt and rust from most tools. After they're clean, an extremely easy way to keep them that way all summer long is to dip them into a bucket full of oily sand (clean sand with a quart of fresh motor oil added). The sand removes the dirt while the oil keeps them conditioned and resistant to moisture. (And, unlike your car, you won't need to change the oil every 3,000 miles!) A little WD-40 sprayed in the moving parts can't hurt either. Check screws and bolts, tighten if necessary.



Get a Handle On It

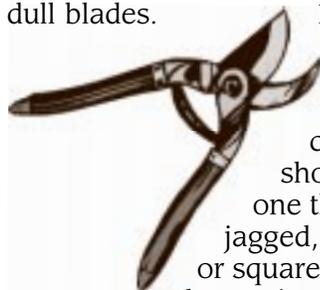
Avoid splinters by lightly sanding



wooden handles. Apply linseed oil to help preserve the wood. DO NOT use duct tape to repair badly damaged or just-about-to-break handles – just replace them! It's cheaper than a trip to the emergency room.

Cuts Like a Knife (Almost)

Your cutting tools don't need to be as sharp as a Ginsu® knife but a clean cut is much easier on plants than being mangled by dull blades.



Digging is also a lot less work with a crisp-edged shovel than one that is jagged, rounded or squared off.

Sharpening tools isn't difficult once you get the hang of it. A medium or bastard-cut file works great in most instances. Clean the tool first, then look for the original bevel on the tool's edge. Use that as your guide to file down nicks and recreate the smoothness. If you want to become a sharpening *expert* and work on tools like knives and finer blades, you'll need a honing stone and plenty of practice.

On Stage: The Nozzles Unplugged

Soaking spray nozzles and sprinklers in a bucket of water and Lime-A-Way removes hard water deposits that may be blocking the holes and reducing water output. (Works well on shower heads, too!)



Hosed

Leaving your hose hooked up with water in it is one way to ensure the purchase of a new one



next year. Granted, hose-carriers aren't cheap, and if you're not

inclined to buy one just empty and hand-coil the hose for storage, indoors (basement, garage, shed) if possible. A tied up trash bag works as a makeshift cover if you need to store it outside; just be sure it's completely dry before sealing it up for its winter hibernation.

I Feel the Earth Move Under My Feet

You will, too, if you properly maintain your tiller. Clean all dirt and debris from the tines and scrape off the packed-on green stuff and soil underneath. Clean or replace the air filter, change the oil and run the engine dry before storing. (By the way, during the gardening season, don't let fuel stay in the tank longer than 30 days without putting in fresh.) And put a sticky note on the tiller reminding you to put in a new spark plug next spring.



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quarrels with
his tools.

-- Unknown