

SHARP TOOLS MAKE FOR EASY GARDENING

Ralph E. Mitchell, Director/Horticulture Agent - Charlotte County UF/IFAS Extension Service

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While we often use our hands as tools in the garden for planting, pulling weeds and even digging small holes, real tools like shovels, hoes, trowels, pruners, etc., are essential to effective gardening. Sharp tools make gardening even easier and help get the job done. While an ax is an obvious candidate for sharpening, even a shovel will work better if it is sharpened. Let's take a look at equipment and techniques that make our tools sharp, safe and ready to use.

Before you begin to sharpen any gardening tools, practice safety and use protective eyewear as little pieces of metal can accidentally fling into your eyes during this activity. Gloves are also appropriate to protect your hands from sharp edges. If you are using electric sharpening tools, ear protection may be a good idea as well.

A variety of tools will be used during the sharpening process. A simple piece of steel wool or a wire brush can be used for cleaning rust and debris from the exposed surfaces. By cleaning the tools prior to sharpening, the process becomes easier and keeps your sharpening devices in better condition for a longer time. Files are perhaps the most basic sharpening tool available. While low-tech, files offer an inexpensive and effective tool that will work with most gardening implements. An 8-10 inch flat file with a comfortable handle is ideal. Flat or mill files are good general purpose tools and round or half-round files can be used for hand pruners or loppers. Consider investing in a bench vice or some type of clamp when sharpening tools. A vice or clamp can hold your tool steady freeing your hands to direct the sharpening process.

There is a whole assortment of other sharpening tools to consider as well. If you are really into sharpening gardening tools, a grinding wheel is probably for you! Best used on heavy tools such as axes, shovels, hoes and machetes, the grinder can also

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1. Use a wire brush to remove rust and debris.
2. Move the file in only one direction and avoid short, jerky strokes.
3. Use 300-grit sandpaper to remove any burrs on the back side of the blade.
4. Wipe a thin layer of oil on the blade of the shovel to prevent rust.



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be used on damaged or extra dull tools. A manual or electric scissor sharpener is a good sharpening tool for something like grass shears. Sharpening stones can be used to put an extra fine edge on a tool. Sandpaper is useful for removing burrs left from the use of a file or grinder. A 300-grit wet/dry sandpaper works the best for this activity. A finishing touch of oil can be applied to a tool that has been sharpened to prevent rust.

Sharpening garden tools takes patience and attention to the angle which results in a properly sharpened tool. With tools such as pruners and axes, follow the original manufacturer's angle

when you need to sharpen it. Some tools such as shovels and hoes have a more blunt edge right from the store and will also benefit from a sharpening. A shovel will function best with a 45 degree angle. Hoes will work best with somewhere between 20-45 degree bevel.

Sharp tools are safe and effective tools!



Some useful equipment for sharpening tools

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Turner, at 764.4351 or email Allison.Turner@CharlotteFL.com. Allison can help educate you about the FYN Program so you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

contact a
MASTER GARDENER
on the Plant Lifeline from 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 764.4340 or by email Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com.

You can also visit them at one of our many **Plant Clinics** around the county:
<http://charlotte.ifas.ufl.edu/PlantClinics.pdf>

Resources:

- Denny, G.C. (2009) Sharpening Tools for Landscaping and Gardening (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP379>). UF/IFAS Extension Service.

Ralph Mitchell is the Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for Charlotte County UF/IFAS Extension Service. Ralph can be reached at 941.764.4344 or by email: Ralph.Mitchell@CharlotteFL.com.



RALPH MITCHELL
Extension Director/Horticulture Agent
Ralph.Mitchell@CharlotteFL.com

CHARLOTTE COUNTY UF/IFAS EXTENSION SERVICE
25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3 - Port Charlotte, Florida 33980
941.764.4340 - 941.764.4343 (fax) - <http://charlotte.ifas.ufl.edu>

