

Garden tool tips to help you have a beautiful landscape

Having a properly maintained selection of outdoor tools can be the difference between a beautiful, flourishing home garden, and a failing one. Dull, rusty, dirty equipment is not only hard to use, but can lead to poor plant performance.

“Once a homeowner has selected their landscape projects, the next logical step is selecting the methods and tools they should use in order to complete the project,” said Jason Kruegel, Metro District forestry technician. “By having working knowledge of the tools and methods to follow, your project will be more enjoyable and fruitful.”

As a homeowner, selecting tools that suit your gardening aspirations can be challenging. There are a wide array of brands and styles, each with unique features. Successful home gardening requires a few essential tools: a quality hose, leaf rake, two types of shovels, a spade and round point, and a couple tarps. However, if you plan on performing maintenance beyond watering, planting, and light clean-up, a few more tools are necessary.

Sharp cutting tools are essential for shrub and ornamental tree pruning. A dull cutting surface can lead to delayed healing time for the plant, and a sore arm for you. Properly sharpened tools allow for smooth cutting and quicker plant healing times, depending on the size of the cut. Hand pruners should be sharpened with a flat file, and lubricated on the joint. To clean your tool, alcohol pads can be used to remove sap from most cutting surfaces. Wearing gloves during any saw/pruner maintenance activity will protect your hands from potential cuts. The same cleaning and sharpening techniques can be applied to pole pruners, and pole saws. Please be cautious when using any tools above your head and always follow proper cutting procedures.

Another landscape technique, mulching, is beneficial to you and your plants and requires additional tools. Placing mulch around plants promotes an understanding of water allocation during the various seasons, and promotes healthy microbial activity in the soil. If you plan on spreading your own mulch, a sturdy pitchfork, wheelbarrow, and scoop shovel are helpful.

If you are tiring of the strenuous task of landscape maintenance, you might turn to power tools. The use of power tools to perform plant maintenance activities can speed things up, but also create more potential danger. Any power tool - chainsaws, tillers, mowers and blowers - all need to be kept clean and in good running order. Proper protective wear should also be used: ear plugs, gloves, chaps, safety glasses, a helmet if working over your head, and work boots. Clean filters, properly mixed fuel in two cycle engines, and properly sharpened cutting surfaces are essential for power tools to function properly. Locally owned tool retailers can often provide sharpening services for power tools for a minimal charge. A dull cutting surface creates more work for the motor and the operator, and equipment failure is costly to repair unless you are able to do the repairs yourself.

Providing a dry, covered area for tool storage will increase the usable life of your tools. If you are able to keep tools clean, dry, and sharp, your yard tasks will be easier. Developing a routine of yard work, followed by tool maintenance will eventually become the norm, and your tools and plants will thank you.

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