How about those Garden Tools? Tasks for an inclement day…



Now that our flower and vegetable beds are tucked in for winter it's time to clean, sharpen, oil and store our garden tools. Oftentimes this important task is overlooked. However it is important to make the time to do it. These simple tasks will extend the life of your tools, eliminate transmissible disease, and make garden work so much easier next Spring.

• Clean – Remove the heaviest bits of dirt from your garden tools with a wire brush and then give them a good wash using a pail of soapy water and a sponge. Steel wool will remove the stubborn bits. Rubbing alcohol is effective for removing sticky residue from pruners that soap and water miss.



• Sharpen – Sharpened cutting edges on shovels, spades, hoes, pruners, lawn mower blades, etc make for lighter work. An appropriate metal file does a good job on most tools. I use a sharpening stone on my various pruners. Our shovels get a good sharpening on the business end but I also like to sharpen up the sides of the blades making it so much easier to dig. A quick touch up through the summer keeps them in top shape.



• Lubricate & protect – Metal surfaces can be protected by using a rag dampened with oil to wipe down the metal parts (penetrating, machine or motor oil). By the way, a tip for keeping spades and shovels clean and protected during the growing season is to fill a 5 gallon pail (about 3/4 full) with sharp sand that has been lightly wetted with motor oil. Each time you finish using a shovel, insert and remove the blade from the sand a few times. It will be both clean and protected when you hang it back up in the shed. Keep the pail of sand in the shed or somewhere dry so you can reuse it all season. Pruners and loppers benefit from lubricating oil on the pivot points. Don't forget the wooden handles of your tools. Inspect them for splinters. Use sand paper or a wood file to smooth rough spots. Then wipe the wooden handles down with a rag dampened with boiled linseed oil. Allow to absorb and repeat. Lay the linseed soaked rag flat in the open air to dry thoroughly before putting it away or disposing of it. Wet oily rags are a fire hazard.



• Store – Garden tools should be stored over winter in a dry place with no contact to ground or concrete. It's a good time to check to see if you have any liquids stored in your shed or areas that will freeze. Move them to a heated space. Don't forget to drain and put away garden hoses and ensure that your exterior water taps are shut off and prepared for winter.

These few simple tasks will be appreciated next Spring when your garden starts to awaken from its long winter slumber and you begin to focus on the joy of new gardening season.

Article by Rick Roberts