



## Minnesota Extension/Douglas County Master Gardeners

# “Let’s Get Growing” Tool Care Demonstration

## Instructions:

### Caring for wood handles:

Clean: soap and water / sandpaper (or sponge type sanding-pad)

Remove polyurethane on any treated handles if not covering adequately (preferred)

Preserve: wipe with boiled linseed oil (at least annually)

### Tool cleaning (general):

After every use, scrape off accumulations of dirt (especially mud) with a wooden scraper, grill brush w/scraper, or hand scraper (painter’s tool)

Clean off remaining dirt and mud with wire brushes (steel minimally OK for shovels, not for hand tools—brass is better); need large and small brushes including tooth brush size for pruners.

Wash with soap and water or clean with product like WD40 and steel wool; use Mineral Spirits (paint thinner) or Turpentine for tough sap residue

Check for and remove carefully any rust with wire brushes, sanding, and steel wool; use rust remover (WD-40 / Rust Free / classic: naval jelly) if necessary

Oil to protect from rust (any oil with good weather protection qualities (Boshield T-9 for example); for organic alternative, use vegetable oil

### Sharpening:

Inspect to determine needs

Dismantle if necessary (rare except annual for better hand pruners)

Examine tool for any bent parts or parts needing alignment (especially bypass cutters) and repair as needed

Choose proper sharpener for the tool being sharpened:

10" mill file (bastard file) for shovels and spades, hoes, and other large blades

Smaller files for pruners and other small tools

Whet stones may be used if preferred

Felco pruners and some other tools require diamond or other high grade files

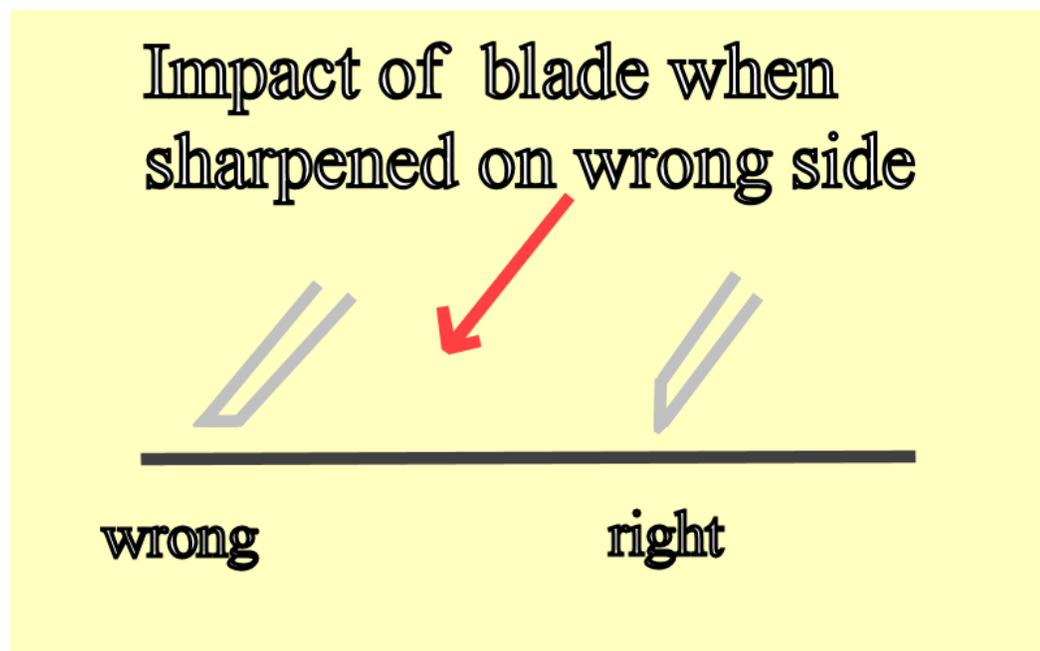
Sharpen tools following proper technique:

Maintain factory (or proper) edge angle

If blade is very dull or nicked, use a coarser file or stone to shape up the blade

Use long sweeping strokes along the cutting edge, not sawing back and forth in one place (remove burrs when necessary)

*Extremely important*—sharpen only on appropriate side(s) of the blade; most garden tools *must* be sharpened on only one side; note how a hoe or shovel cuts into the ground (or root) when sharpened on alternate sides of the blade.



File only in the cutting edge direction of the file (most metal files are single cut)

File on the correct side of the cutting blade (many come sharpened on the wrong side or not sharpened at all, especially shovels, spades and hoes)

## Tips for Individual Tools:

### Shovels and Spades

Don't neglect wooden handle care; many tools are lost due to no handle care

Most likely tools to rust; keep clean, dry and oiled to avoid it

Important to be sharp, for easier digging, but also for cutting roots when transplanting  
Should be beveled on the top side  
Most common sharpening tool: mill (bastard) file; second is a hand sized whet stone

## Hoes

Dull hoes affect gardening activities negatively more than any other tool activity  
Like some woodworking tools, many hoes are not sharpened at all when purchased and many gardeners do not even know it!  
Hoes should be beveled on the inside (or topside when you hoe) so that the dirt curls up. A bottom bevel when struck hits flat making it harder to cut into the dirt than if not sharpened at all (See illustration)! This makes cutting through weeds and dirt easier.  
Common garden hoes and most others are best sharpened with a mill (bastard) file or hand size whet stone.

## Shears

Inspect carefully for blade fit; shears are easily bent, damaged or gotten out of alignment.  
First make sure the sides of the blades are flat and clean  
Make any needed adjustments (may require taking apart and some shop work) including checking bolt tightness; assure the blades cross tightly from one end to the other.  
Important—sharpen only on the factory beveled side.  
Sharpen with a mill (bastard) file (most common) or other sharpening tool  
Lubricate working mechanism

## Anvil Pruner

Check carefully for two common problems, both due to trying to cut oversized branches: a dulled cutting edge and a bent cutting blade. Straighten and align the blade first if needed, then sharpen  
Sharpen on *both* sides of the blade being careful to remove the same amount of material on each side (small file—diamond best—or whet stone)  
Lubricate the working mechanism

## Bypass Pruner

At least annually disassemble the pruner for a thorough cleaning  
Make sure the two blades are flat and adjust so they come together cleanly  
Sharpen only on the outside of the cutting blade with a small file (diamond files are best) or stone; better pruners (the Felco in particular) are made with very hard steel and require a harder sharpener like a diamond file  
Lubricate the working mechanism



# Supplies:

## CLEANUP

- Wood Scraper
- Bar-B-Q Grill Brush (w/scraper)
- Hand scraper (painter's tool or wall scraper/ stiff putty or drywall knife)
- Hose, soap and bowl for washing
- Steel Wool (fine and course)
- Wire Brushes (brass: large/small)
- WD40
- Rust remover (like Rust Free by Boshield)
- Wet/dry Sandpaper or sponge sander
- Turpentine or Mineral Spirits
- Linseed Oil or Tung Oil
- Rags

## SHARPENING

- 10" Flat Mill File (bastard), round file (optionally)
- Small diamond or steel file
- Whet Stone(s)
- Honing Oil
- Rags: for stone base and wiping
- Clamp(s), not required but helpful

## LUBRICATION

- Water repellent oil (like Boshield T-9) / 3 in 1 Oil / vegetable oil

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