

6 Simple Ways to Care for Garden Tools

(From Harley Davidson)

1. Easiest of all, rinse soil off digging tools after each use. Make a pit stop at garden hose and keep a stiff brush hanging by hose. Dry thoroughly. (If you have been working with infected plants or pruning diseased limbs, disinfect after cleaning so you don't spread disease. Use rubbing alcohol or dilute bleach (10%): 1 part bleach to 9 parts water will work.
2. Use a bucket of sand moistened with Stihl bar and chain oil to dip tools in after cleaning. Add enough oil to mix with sand until damp. This will keep tools from rusting. Cover with lid to keep mixture from drying out. (If needed, use steel wool to remove rust first)
3. Use linseed oil on a rag to wipe wooden handles of tools.
4. Keep tools stored inside shed or garage. Hang them up rather than leaning against wall and touching floor. Moisture and rust are the enemy.
5. Pruning shears should last a long time if you don't let sap residue build up. Wash at sink with soap and a scrubby pad or brush. Dry well and lubricate on pivot points only. Use 3 in 1 or equivalent to protect against rust and corrosion. WD40 will evaporate and cause rust to form. (Harley recommends Super Zilla [a green formula] – a penetrating lubricant and rust preventative and PB Blaster for oiling tools).
6. Sharpen tools regularly especially loppers and pruners. If tools are dull, they require more effort into every cut or dig. Check these for loose blades which can cause an uneven or bad cut or no cut.

Ways to sharpen tools:

Use metal files: easy to use, can quickly remove steel to sharpen blade but may leave rough edges. Prevent this and keep factory bevel evenly sharp by using one motion along full length of blade.

To use a file: start with a clean tool. If you are having difficulty with sap removal, use a foaming bathroom cleaner or paint thinner.

Stroke file across edge of tool in a back-and-forth motion. Moderate pressure going forward and a very slight drag on the return will help clear shavings. A heavier pressure will dull one side.

For pruners, to sharpen blade edge: hold pruners in non-sharpening hand. Stroke sharpener against blade factory bevel, pulling sharpener away from pruner handles. Run file on entire length of blade in one smooth continuing stroke. Run file parallel with blade about 5 times. Then check your work. The blade should begin to shine and should be an even width. When the bur starts to form on the opposite side, flip blade over to remove the bur.

After sharpening, lube with oil. Harley uses the same procedure for shearers as pruners.

Grinders - should only be used by those with experience. Can ruin a blade quickly if too much metal is removed as heat builds which removes temper. (blade will turn blue which requires re-tempering. This will cost more than a new blade)

Safety

Wear eye protection and work gloves to protect from metal shavings when sharpening tools. It helps to use a bench vise and you should always wear safety glasses and gloves.