



Garden tools: think before you buy

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Sometimes, in a *Desert Island Discs* kind of way, my students ask which two garden tools I couldn't do without. I always choose the secateurs and the spade.

Pruning a tree or a rose bush requires a secateurs, a loppers and perhaps a saw. Without these tools, the job will take a whole lot longer and risks damaging the plant.

Remember that secateurs come in right and left handed versions. Always use a 'by-pass' secateurs rather than an anvil type, as they do less damage to plant tissue.

Possibly the best (and correspondingly expensive) secateurs you can buy are the Swiss-made Felco range. They come in various types, including those with rotating and hydraulic handles.

Other makes are available, in a range of quality levels. You can buy

very cheap tools, but you will be buying them (at least) twice. Buy the best you can afford, but only what you need, and maintain them well.

Use a spade to cut through roots or to cut an edge. Never a shovel! However, after you have cut the edge, dig out the soil with the shovel. In other words, always try to use the right tool for the job in question and never use a spade as a lever – use a crow bar.

Suitable garden spades like Spear & Jackson should be narrow bladed with a long handle, which makes it much easier to cut the soil than a wide blade.

Storage

Now, probably the most important consideration – storage. Leaving tools out in the yard or garden to rust away is a waste of money. Clean them off, oil them, keep them sharp and store them properly and they will always be available and ready for use.

Clip-on type garden tools are designed to save on space. Wolf Garten, for example, produces a range of attachment type tools which can all

be connected to one universal handle. These include a clip-on hoe, rake and brush etc, designed to make every job in the garden doable. Then all you need is the will to do it!

In our modern era of sustainability, we should do as much work as possible by hand. Where an engine is necessary, I advocate battery power. At home, we use only battery powered hedge trimmers, strimmers and lawnmowers.

As is the case with cars, battery life is getting better each year. The need for machinery is obviously related to the types of garden we choose and the philosophy we employ in their planning. You can decide not to have a lawn. Wildflower or bulb meadows are good alternatives.

Gardening is meant to be enjoyable, not a nagging endurance test. Buy lightweight equipment, especially when choosing power tools. Look at your garden, see what you need to do to maintain it for your enjoyment. Then shop around and choose the very best equipment to suit your needs.