

## How to Winterize Your Garden Tools or get them ready for spring!

*Some of you may have forgotten to take care of your garden tools when you put them up in the fall. Well, it's not too late to do what you should have done back in the fall. Just overlook the references to winter and take care of your tools now before you get started for the spring planting season. Good Luck!*

As winter approaches, many of you are hard at work preparing your garden for cold weather. Hopefully, you've already planted that cover crop, applied a fresh layer of mulch and prepared your cold frames for fresh winter greens. You know that a little winter prep can really pay off when spring arrives, but don't forget that your garden tools need a little TLC as well. Here are some tips on how to keep them in great shape while they await the return of warm, sunny days.

- Remove all dried or caked-on dirt with a wire brush, rinse and dry thoroughly. (Soak especially dirty tools in water first.)
- Sharpen dull tools using a whetstone or file. Working at a 45-degree angle, start at the outer edge and move toward the center.
- Sand off any rust spots with fine sandpaper or steel wool, and coat the metal with vegetable oil.
- Wipe a light coating of linseed oil or paste wax on wooden handles to preserve them and prevent cracking or splitting.
- Store hand trowels and other small tools in a bucket of sand soaked in oil to further deter rust, and hang rakes and shovels in an easy-to-access spot.
- Bring water hoses in out of the weather and ensure that they're properly drained and coiled correctly (not kinked). Repair leaks with a hose repair kit which you can get at your local home or garden store. There's no need to buy a new hose ? even leaky fittings can be replaced with minimal time, money and effort.
- On your mower, be sure to clean and sharpen the blades (residue can encourage rust. Avoid storing gasoline in your mower over the winter; transfer it to your car's engine instead.

Good tools are expensive. Take good care of yours and they'll contribute to many years of productive gardening.

*Sheri Bethard, Orange County Master Gardeners Adapted from <https://www.motherearthnews.com/organic-gardening/how-to-winterize-your-garden-tools>*