



The right equipment makes any job easier. **But what tools are really worth buying?** And what should you be looking for before you purchase? Here are the basics and a few guidelines to help you stock your garden tool kit.

## Shovels

You can choose from a couple different styles of shovel. A standard garden shovel has a rounded blade with a slightly pointed tip and a folded-over step at the top of the shovel "head" where you put your foot to push the blade into the ground. The garden shovel is a versatile tool most useful for digging holes or trenches. The wide, concave blades and flat tips of scoop shovels are best suited to moving mulch and other loose materials. **Shovels come with wood or fiberglass shafts.** Wood is sturdy but heavy. Fiberglass is light and long-lasting but may break more readily.

## Spades

Spades have square heads with sharp edges at the bottom. Spades are the best choice for giving garden beds clean edges, separating sod from the ground when building new beds, and dividing perennials for replanting. Garden spades typically have shorter shafts than shovels and often have a "D" style handle at the top to give you leverage. Perennial spades have longer, narrow heads and pointed tips. They're designed to let you dig up perennials in tight spaces without disturbing neighboring plants.

## Garden Forks

Garden forks have four sharp, strong tines that are used to loosen packed soil when building new beds or preparing for planting. A broad fork is a two-handed alternative that can break up very hard or dense soil. Compost (or manure) forks have long slender, pointed tines that are turned up slightly for scooping or moving loose material, such as mulch.

## Trowels

Small shovels you hold in one hand are known as trowels. They are the right tool to use when digging holes for seedlings in garden beds or containers, and they make it easy to pop out weeds with long taproots, such as dandelions. **Trowels have heads that generally range from 6 to 8 inches long and 3 to 5 inches wide, and are made from stainless steel, carbon steel, aluminum, or plastic.**

## Rakes

Leaf or grass rakes have V-shaped heads that widen out from the shaft. The heads may be made of flexible aluminum or plastic and can be dragged lightly across the ground to gather up fallen leaves and cut or dead grass. You can find models with narrow heads to reach between and around shrubs and perennials. Garden or soil rakes (sometimes referred to as "bow" rakes) have steel heads with sharp, rigid tines. They're used to level soil and groom planting beds. Like shovels, rakes may have wooden or fiberglass shafts.

## Hoes

**Hoes designs vary based on the task they're used for.** Classic chopping (aka paddle) hoes, with their solid, heavy heads, break up clods of soil and thick clumps of weeds. The head on a stirrup or scuffle hoe is open, so it can carve through the soil and sever weeds below the surface. Collinear hoes have flat, rectangular heads with sharp edges that slice off weeds in tight spaces.

## Hand Weeders

Many hand weeder styles are just smaller versions of hoes, but there are other designs, too. The classic three- or four-tined "hand rake" works well for grooming seedbeds and container soil. The serrated edge of a weeding (or hori hori) knife cuts through tough roots and clumps of weeds. The forked points of dandelion diggers get under weeds with long taproots so you can lever them out of the ground.





## Pruners And Loppers

Bypass pruners cut like scissors and are the tool for trimming living branches and harvesting flowers for bouquets. Anvil-style pruners cut with a sharp blade against a flat surface. They're used to remove dead wood. Both kinds are suitable for branches and stems up to one-half-inch in diameter. Loppers are two-handed versions that cut branches up to 1 inch in diameter. Some brands offer loppers with ratchets, gear mechanisms gradually increase the pressure as you cut through harder woods.

## Pruning Saws

Large-toothed hand saws can cut branches that are from 1 to 3 inches in diameter. Bow saws give you leverage and pressure for slicing through hard wood. Shorter pruning saws work in tight spaces in the interior of trees and shrubs.

## Handy Gear

### Wheelbarrow or garden cart

Heavy loads, such as mulch or topsoil, are easiest to move with wheelbarrows. Garden carts are useful for toting hand tools, plants, and other supplies to where they're needed in the garden.

### Watering wand

The best way to water your plants is right on the soil. The extended reach of a watering wand lets you aim the spray even in back corners of beds and borders. It also makes watering hanging baskets easier, too. Watering wands come in lengths ranging from 10 to 48 inches.

### Gloves

Protect your hands from splinters, cuts, thorns, and dirty fingernails with sturdy gloves. Fabric gloves with coated fingers and palms allow plenty of dexterity, hold up to hard use, and are breathable for wearing on hot days. Leather gloves with long cuffs are the best choice for pruning roses and other thorny plants.

## Quality Check

Stainless steel tools are durable and resist rusting, and they tend to be the most expensive choice. Carbon steel tools are also strong and long-lasting. They both hold their sharpened edge, making digging easier. While chrome-plated steel and aluminum options tend to be lighter and less expensive, they can't be sharpened and are more likely to bend or chip when digging in rocky soil or other hard conditions. **Plastic trowels are lightweight and low cost.** They work with potting soil, but they are prone to breaking when challenged.

High-quality garden tools can be pricey, but they are likely to last a lifetime of hard work. If you can't afford new tools, check estate and yard sales, and online marketplaces for used ones. They may need only to be cleaned and sharpened to be as effective as new tools.

**The best way to ensure your tools are ready to go every season is to keep the edges sharp.** Between the end of one growing season and the next, thoroughly clean the blades of steel shovels, spades, hoes, pruners, and trowels, coat them with light vegetable oil to prevent rust, and sharpen them.

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