



Gardening Begins in the Workshop

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Before you get to work in the garden, put your shop tools to work on spades, hoes and trowels. If you didn't get your garden tools put away properly last fall, it's not too late. Clear the workbench, and get out a few simple tools to prep your garden tools before the season gets too hectic. Of course, if you are like my gardening brother-in-law in Georgia, you have been hard at it for a month or more already. If so, take a mid-season break from the garden and stop by your workshop. Use that handy steel brush to clear away left behind dirt and use a little steel wool to remove rust.

Sharpening Up

A few strokes with a steel file on spade and hoe edges always makes future digging faster and easier. Check for the beveled side, and then clamp it down in a vise or with C-clamps to secure it with the beveled side up and away from you. Check the existing bevel for the correct angle for sharpening. If the edge is too worn, sharpen for expected use.

A steep edge (1/4 in. or less) is a tougher edge and best for rough work, such as roots and rocks. A shallow edge is sharper, but not as durable, and best used in long-term beds and softer soils.

Regardless of angle, make file strokes long and across the face of the blade, with down pressure on the forward stroke and little if any on the back stroke.

Use a double-cut tooth pattern file for taking out chips and a single-cut pattern for finishing the job. As the edge sharpens, a slight bur will develop on the other side of the blade. Once the blade of the tool is sharpened to preference, run the smoother face of the file lightly across the non-beveled edge to clean off the bur.

The more you intend to use the digging tool, the more important sharpening is. Likewise, the more you use the tool, the sooner you need to resharpen.

Keep your files clean, your steel brush handy and your digging in the garden will be easier, faster and a lot more pleasant.

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