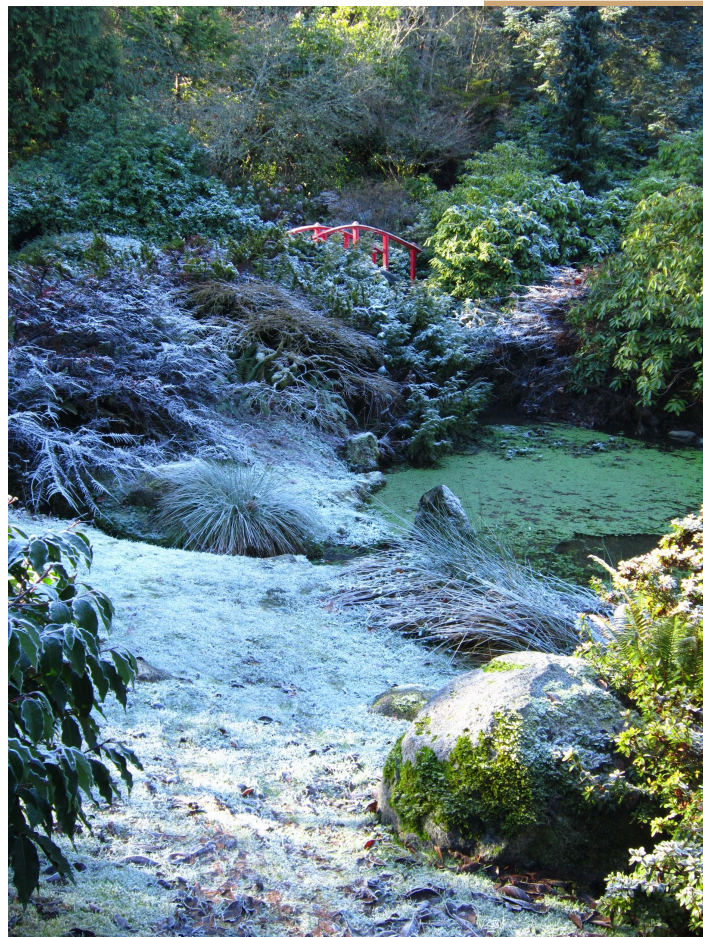


Welcome to taking care of your tools.

Make yourself comfortable. We'll start momentarily.

Seattle Beacon Hill Garden Club



Kubota Garden photo by Katrina Perekrstenko

We'll cover some basic tool tips, including how to clean and sharpen your garden tools.



Why should you worry about your tools?

It can save you money in the long term.

It's safer for you.

And it's better for your plants!



The right tool for the right job



Trust me
I'm an engineer

There are a lot of garden tools out there and it's good to know and use the appropriate tool for the job.

How do you know if it's the right tool?

Sometimes it's obvious, like this.

Please don't do this!

One big clue...

if you are using a lot of force, maybe you need to step up to a larger tool to get the job done.

For example, look at what the pruner is rated for, most will tell you how big of a branch it can cut.

Don't use a garden shovel as a pry bar.
Long handled tools are not meant to move solid objects.



What to look for when picking tools

There are a lot of used tools you can pick up at garage sales. That said, always take a closer look to see if they are in good shape.

Probably can be repaired:

- A little rust or minor crackling on wood.
- Wobbly screws

Pass, it may be close to failing:

- Metal that is so rusted it's brittle or peeling.
- Large cracks in handles.
- Brittle rubber, plastic or fiberglass.

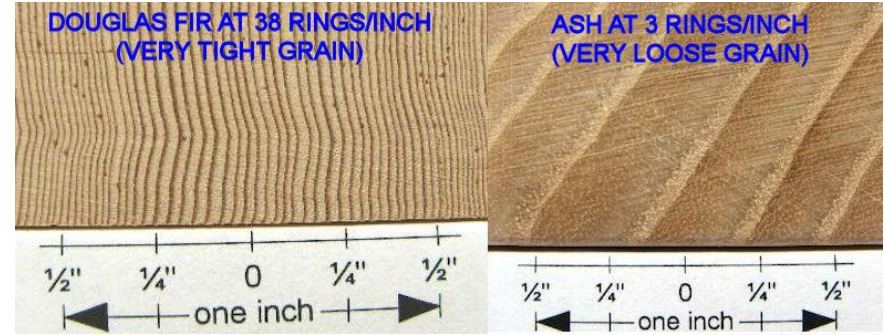


If you can, invest in quality tools. They will last longer and often can be repaired more cost effectively than buying a new tool every season.



Materials

With wood handles generally the tighter the grain the stronger it is. Also look for the grain running in the direction of the force for better strength.



Fiberglass or plastic handles are lightweight but more fragile and can shatter. Sunlight can weaken them over time.

Metal handles are strong but can be cold/hot depending on weather.

Stainless steel is less prone to rust but you still need to keep it clean.





Keep it clean

Regular cleaning can prevent rust, disease and just yuck.

Daily cleaning

Prevent the mess by watching where you lay your tools when you are working with them. Avoid laying them in the mud.

Most of the time you can just rinse off with the hose or scrape off mud with a wire brush, sand or another garden tool. Try to get any dirt and debris out of all the nooks and crannies.



Major Cleaning

Always good to do a really major cleaning before putting tools away for an extended period of time. You may need to do more often if the daily cleaning isn't working.

You can also use a cleaner there's a lot of differing opinions on what you can use.

Some prescribe dishwashing or castile soap.

Some reference using something like scrubbing bubbles but others advise against it because it's pretty abrasive and could leave pitting in the metal which can harbor disease.

Others use a bucket of sand as a way to dislodge the dirt.

For stuck on sap and other sticky stuff, orange or lemon oil/extract really well.



Here's a controversial topic to consider.

There are a lot of ways you can spread plant disease in your garden, it can be from your boots, gloves or your tools.

There's a lot of debate out there on if, how, and when you need to disinfect your tools.

One end of the spectrum is to disinfect between each plant and the other end is to only if you know there is disease present or for prized plants.

I personally take the middle approach, for example, I try to always clean my pruners between my different rose bushes since I know they are prone to the same diseases.

I don't propose to have the right answer, I'd advise you to do your own research and figure out your comfort zone.

That said, there are also different ways to disinfect:

Again, a lot of conflicting opinion on what is “best.” Do your research.

- 70% isopropyl alcohol either as swabs or in a small spray bottle. The individual packets of swabs are easy to keep in your pocket.
 - Household cleaners like Lysol or Pine Sol.
 - Diluted Chlorine bleach (10 parts water to 1 part bleach) will disinfect but it's really corrosive on your tools.
 - With any disinfectant, wipe away any excess to avoid hurting the plant and don't let it contaminate the soil.
-



Don't leave them out in the elements. It will cause rust on the metal and rot in any wooden parts.

But if you did and now they look like this...

you can try scrubbing with steel wool, wire brush, sandpaper, or sand.

Really bad rust may need to be soaked overnight in vinegar but make sure to wash and clean really well afterwards.



Also, never put your tools away wet.

That's a recipe for more rust.

Dry them off thoroughly.

Apply a coat of vegetable oil or Felco 980 oil (biodegradable) to the metal parts to prevent further rust, especially after a vinegar treatment.



Tighten it up

For most tools, you will have rivets, screws or bolts holding it together. It's always good to tighten up any wiggle parts.

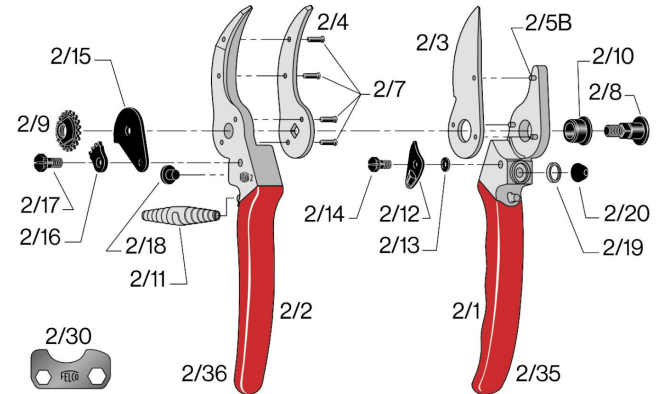
Occasionally, blades will get misaligned, if you've sharpened the blades but it's still not cutting cleanly, you may need disassemble and adjust.

Whenever you are disassembling tools, make sure to take photos or line them up in order of assembly to make life easier when you are putting back together.

Lubricate moving parts to keep things working smoothly.



FELCO 2



Handle with care

Over time wooden handles dry out and small cracks will appear and leave splinters in your hands. A major crack in the handle like this may be beyond repair. You may be able to replace handles on shovels.

Sand wooden handles down until smooth with some light sandpaper.

Apply boiled linseed oil to keep it from drying out further. Make sure the boiled linseed oil has no additives for quick dry.

And those rags with linseed oil will be flammable so make sure to dispose of safely and properly.



Dull is boring

Keeping your tools sharp
makes your life easier.

It also keeps your plants healthier!
Dull and ragged cuts can provide
opportunity for disease to enter
your plants.



General Tool Sharpening Tips

Always start with clean and dry tools before sharpening.

Shovels and spades are probably the easiest to start out with.

Pruners come in second but they may need to be disassembled to be sharpened. Take pictures as you take it apart so you remember how to put it back together.

The most difficult are serrated edges, we aren't going to cover that tonight. There are professionals who will sharpen your tools if you would like to start out with a good edge and maintain from there.



If your blade is bent or nicked, you probably can't fix it.

Types of sharpeners

There are many tools to sharpen. Some off the shelf models are self contained and easy to use out in the field. They are usually about the size of a pen.

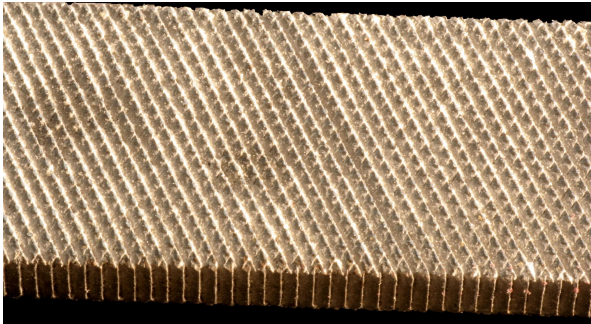
Sharpening Stones. Many different sharpening stones out there. They usually take off less material and can be used for fine tuning. Depending on the type of stone, it may be used dry or with water or honing oil.



Types of sharpeners

Metal files that you may already have around the house. You may notice they have single or double cross hatching on the file. A single cut won't take off as much material and is usually used for fine tuning. A double cut takes off more material faster.

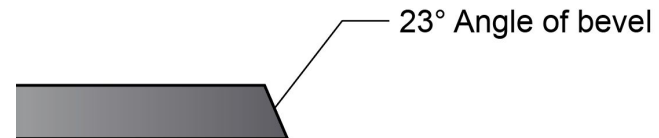
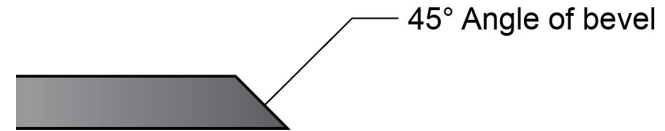
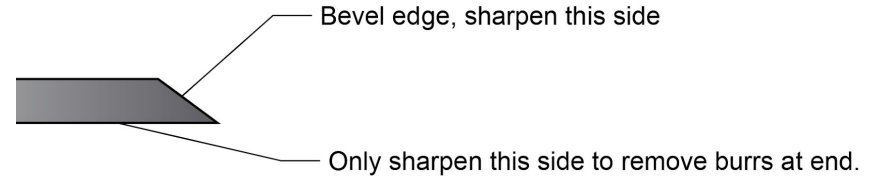
There are numbers on the files, listing mesh and micron. All you really need to keep in mind is that the higher the mesh number (120 -8000 mesh) or the lower the micron the sharper the edge (120 - 3 micron).



Find the bevel

This is the side are going to sharpen. If you sharpen with a bright light or sunlight behind you, look to find where the bevel will reflect brightest. You want to sharpen until it becomes even brighter and shinier. Another trick is to use a marker to color in the bevel edge and sharpen until the color is all gone.

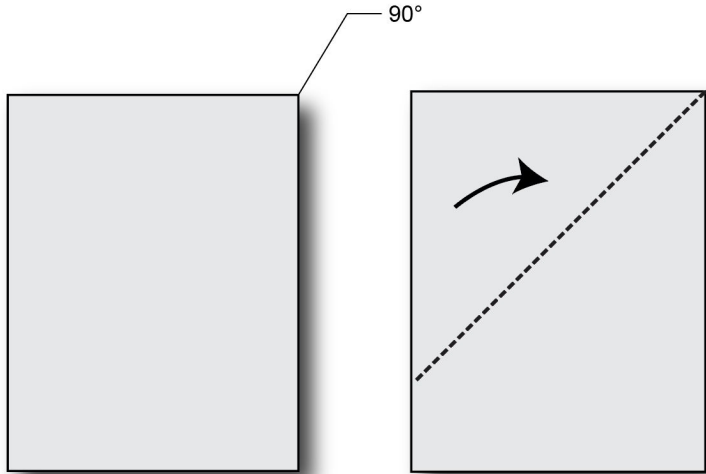
You want to try and match the existing bevel edge. On a shovel it may be more like 45 degrees. On pruners, like Felco, it's about 23 degrees.



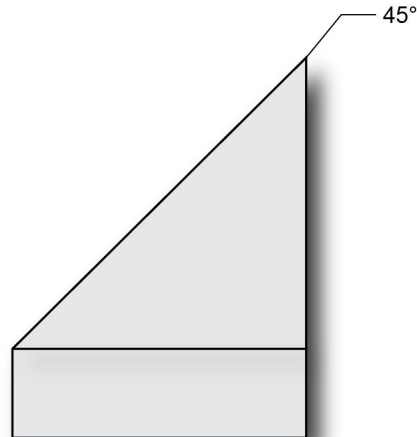
So what do these degrees that look like in real life?

Here's a quick way to visualize the angles, take a letter size piece of paper.

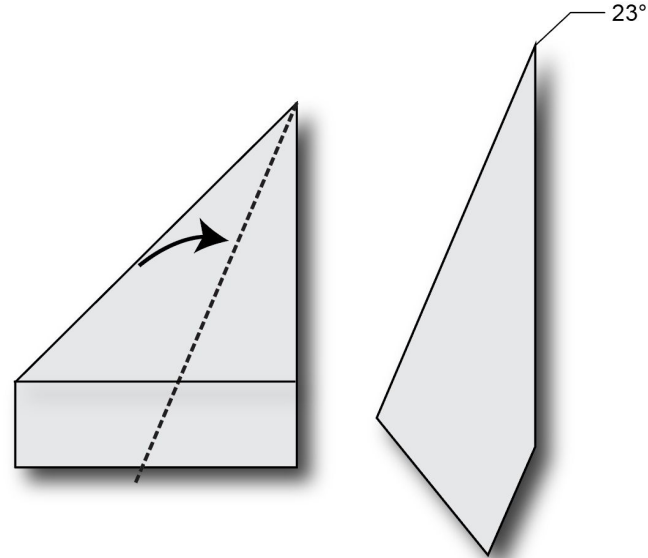
It's 90 degrees at each corner.



If I take the top and side of the paper and fold it so they meet perfectly in the corner that's your 45 degrees.



If you take that and fold it again to make the sides meet, you have about 23 degrees.



Now sharpen!

Once you've found your bevel, match your sharpening tool to that angle and smoothly push evenly along towards the front of the blade. You only need to do a few passes.

Examine the flat side of blade and do a pass or two to remove any burrs.

Don't oversharpen! You can create too thin of an edge that will roll over.



Bevel angle is too steep.
The thin edge is rolling over.

Always use caution and make sure the tool is secured well before starting. Safety glasses and gloves are always fashionable.

Other helpful tips

Neon spray paint can help you from losing your small hand tools in the pile of brush you just cut or if you're working in a community garden. Holsters are great to also keeping track of those pruners.

Use an old garden hose, slit on one side, to slip over shovels and sharp edges when storing to keep them from getting nicked.



References & Resources

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Thank you!

Questions?
What tips do you have to share?

