

BUYING

GARDENING TOOLS



Pruning Saw
Hedge Shears
Garden Rake
Secateurs
Loppers

Trowel
Garden Fork
Spades & Shovels
Hedge Trimmer

**What do YOU need to know
when buying these tools?**

FREE

REPORT

Buying Gardening Tools

Introduction

What gardening tools do you need? This is a pretty simple question that anyone who has a garden, wants to know the answer to. Other questions you might be asking are ‘what do I look for when buying tools?’ or ‘how much can I expect to spend?’ These questions are particularly important if you have just decided to get into gardening. Having the right tools can make a very big difference when it comes to doing the work and if the work is easier, the chances are you’ll stick to your goals of growing a better garden! The problem is if you are new to gardening you probably don’t KNOW what to buy. Even some people who have been gardening for years have been doing so using tools not designed for the job they are applying them to.

Many people get to this stage, jump online and scour the internet for hours trying to find out everything they need to know. Look no further! In this e-book I will outline the top 8 tools that I believe every gardener should own PLUS a *bonus* look at another handy tool for the slightly more serious green thumbs (or prospective green thumbs) out there. I will outline what is important to know about each tool, its use, what to look for when buying, any different varieties of the tool that are available and what you can expect to pay for cheap, intermediate and expensive varieties.

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Hedge Shears

The first tool I am going to overview are called 'Hedge shears' or sometimes called 'Hedge clippers'. I have chosen this tool to overview first is because I have made rookie mistakes when buying hedge shears. A while back I had a \$20 gift voucher and I made the mistake of settling for an inferior variety that didn't cost all of my voucher. As I should have expected, they didn't even last their first use before the shaft bent placing the blades out of whack. If you want to avoid this then keep reading about what YOU should look for when buying hedge shears.



What is the function of hedge shears?

The main function of hedge shears is in 'shearing' or trimming hedges. Most shrubs need trimming at some point so as to stop them from taking over your garden and the best manual tool for the job is hedge shears.

When it comes to buying hedge shears it really is true that you get what you paid for, as I was sadly reminded. As a general rule (and it is VERY general) when I go to a shop I wouldn't even CONSIDER the cheapest two options. This is just a PERSONAL rule (which I violated with bad results) that usually saves me from anguish. I am yet to buy either the cheapest or second cheapest hedge shears and NOT have them become pretty much useless in a short time.

What you need to look for in a pair of hedge shears is;

1. Is the blade sharp? It is hard to test this without feeling the blade (VERY CAREFULLY) but you can get a rough idea of its sharpness by gently touching the blade. It SHOULD NOT feel smooth, if it feels smooth then it is already slightly flat and won't get better with use!
2. Are the blades curved? Curved blades help stop branches slipping down the blade as you cut, giving you better results when cutting.
3. Are the handles strong? I myself prefer wooden handles simply because I know they are strong however if you want a lighter tool, try and find a hedge trimmer with handles made of carbon fibres or something similar. I try and stay away from aluminium handles because they bend more easily when force is applied.

Finally shears are not designed to cut thick branches, they are designed to trim the the foliage of hedge plants. A general rule is don't try and cut branches thicker than your thumb, for that you'll need a tool called a 'lopper', another of the tools I'll review.

Cost

A 'cheap' pair of sturdy hedge shears will set you back at LEAST \$20, if you're paying less you are probably buying the cheapest or next to cheapest tool. An expensive pair of shears will be in excess of \$100. A good range is probably the \$40-\$50 cost range. Very rarely will you buy a tool for that price that doesn't back up its cost for general use. If you are running a gardening business you may well like to consider buying a more expensive model designed for higher use.

Secateurs

3 kinds of secateurs

When it comes to gardening you really won't get far without a good pair of secateurs. But what makes secateurs good? What should you look for when you are shopping for secateurs? One thing many gardeners don't know is that there are actually three different kinds of secateurs, Anvil, Bypass and Parrot Beak. Very quickly, Anvil secateurs have an upper blade which pushes down onto a flat lower 'anvil'. Parrot Beak secateurs have two blades which cut by meeting together in the middle and looks like a parrot's beak. The third kind of secateurs is called Bypass secateurs. They work by having two blades which bypass each other in a similar way to scissors. The big difference between Bypass and Parrot Beak secateurs is the shape of the blades, with Parrot Beak having two identical blades compared to Bypass which has one large and one small blade, the large blade being convex in shape and the small blade being concave in shape. Bypass secateurs are the main type used and sold and will be the focus of this entry.



What to look for

When buying secateurs there are a few things to consider. One of the most important things to check out is how they feel in your hand. When you are out shopping, pick up a few pairs and see how they feel. Feel for weight, feel for grip. Most secateur's handles will be shaped with little divots for your fingers to go in, find the pair whose divots best fit your hand.

Another key tip is to make sure the secateurs you are keen on have a safety latch that is easily engaged and disengaged with one hand. When you are pruning a plant, if you have to stop and use two hands to engage the safety latch it is more likely that you won't. A safety latch is only useful if it is likely to be put to use.

Try and look for secateurs with plastic covered metal handles. Metal handles are strong but are cold to work with and plastic handles are a sign of cheap manufacturing and are not likely to last as well as metal handles.

There are three different blade types, stainless steel, coated steel and carbon steel. My preference is for stainless steel but carbon steel works well too. Either of these kinds will stay the sharpest for longer periods of time. The only real upside to coated steel is that it cleans more easily. Cleaning your secateurs after use is extremely important but having blades that remain sharp are better for the job at hand.

The general rule of thumb with secateurs is, strangely enough, don't try cutting plant limbs that are thicker than your thumb. If you try and cut limbs that are too thick you will damage the blade and therefore your tool that you have invested in will not last as well for as long. Once again the best tool for limbs thicker than your thumb is a lopper.

Cost

Prices range from \$5-\$10 at the cheap end right up to \$150-\$200. Again for a household gardener I'd say a you could probably get a pair that will work ok for \$20-\$40 but a good pair at around \$50 may well last you a decade or more. My Grandma had a pair that I know was much older than I was when I was 10, good tools well looked after last a while.

Loppers

So far I have discussed how secateurs and hedge shears are good for trimming or pruning the skinny limbs of plants but there are times when pruning involves the removal of limbs thicker than your thumb. If you trim these with secateurs or hedge shears you risk damaging the tool and it is for this very reason that loppers are a must-own tool for you.



Types of Loppers

Like with secateurs there are a few kinds of loppers but once again the most prevalent are called bypass loppers, named after the style of the blade used. However, there is another decision to be made with loppers and that is whether to buy loppers that have a ratchet action or not. Ratchet loppers basically cut the limb in stages, allowing the best leverage possible with minimal effort. If you plan on regularly cutting decent width limbs or if you don't have a lot of strength in your hands then I strongly recommend looking for loppers with a ratchet action. This is more costly but will save you a lot of time and effort.

What to look for

As far as I am concerned the two most important things to take into account when buying loppers after you have decided which type you want is weight and handle length. What you want will depend entirely on your circumstances. If you plan to trim plants with limbs that are quite high up then you will need to buy loppers either with longer natural handles OR with the ability to be lengthened. Also, in this scenario a lot of work will be taking place above your head so you will want to have light handles (probably made of a slightly strengthened aluminium) so you don't tire quite so quickly.

Make sure you check the blade is sharp. If there is no way of testing the tools on a branch in store then find a piece of paper and test it. This isn't a fool proof method given the fact paper is much easier to cut than plant limbs but if the blades don't cut paper quickly, efficiently and straight then you can't expect that they will do a much better job on plant limbs.

Cost

Garden loppers normally range in price from \$15 to \$150, I wouldn't touch a pair cheaper than \$30 and would probably look at the tools in the \$50-\$60 cost range. If you make the right decision with lopper purchase the tool quite possibly will last you for life as good garden loppers that are not made of metals likely to rust really do tend to handle the life of a garden tool well.

Garden trowel

What is a garden trowel you might ask? Isn't that a picture of a hand shovel? Well, it all depends! I actually had a hard time 'naming' this tool because if there is a garden tool that has many names then what I've grown up calling a 'little' shovel is it! Hand shovel, trowel, little shovel, little spade, digger, this tool has many various names. However what they all have in common is that they refer to one of the most important tools in a gardeners shed. Whether it be digging up weeds or planting new plants, you won't get too far without using a hand shovel.



What to look for

What makes a good garden trowel? What should you be looking for when you go down to your local gardening tools shop to purchase a hand shovel? Does it really matter which one you buy?

There are basically only two parts to a hand shovel, the handle and the blade and both are very important considerations when looking to buy a trowel. Many people go out and buy a cheap garden trowel, take it home, start digging and find that the blade is as malleable as the soil they are digging in! Though a garden trowel with a warped blade can usually still do the job, it isn't nearly as efficient. To ensure a long lasting trowel blade make sure you buy a trowel with a blade made of metal, not plastic. Steel blades are the best but I have had some success with blades made of an aluminium alloy. This all depends on the composition of aluminium to alloy. What I do to test them is I place a little force on the blade to see how strong it 'feels'. Be careful obviously because you don't want it to actually bend in store, you can usually get a feel for the strength of the blade without actually damaging it. Of course, if it does feel like the blade would bend easily from the small force you are placing on it, imagine what a big of tough soil or root could do?

When it comes to the handle as far as I am concerned it is all about comfort. You will likely spend many an hour in the garden with your trusty garden trowel in hand, you want it to be comfortable. This also takes into account why you shouldn't buy a plastic handles trowel, it isn't very strong and they don't tend to be high on the comfort stakes. A good rubber coated metal handle I find to be best, though there are a few other coverings to metal handles you might find and they are normally ok as well. Try and find a trowel that has grooves in place for your fingers and check the grooves match your hand. Having said this some people prefer a handle without grooves. The key here is choosing one that feels comfortable to you.

Cost

As far as cost goes, the best trowel I have ever had actually only cost \$10. Trowels are one tool I know many people have had luck with at cheap prices. As per usual though, spending more around that \$30-\$50 price range will increase your chances of your chosen garden trowel lasting your lifetime, but if you find a cheap trowel that passes all the above tests, buy it!

Spades & Shovels

Spades and shovels are one of the most used tools when it comes to gardening. They serve a variety of purposes from breaking soil to shifting compost, from mixing concrete to shoveling leaves. What has always amazed me though is many peoples inability to name a spade a spade. Even I, up until about the age of 15, didn't really 'get' the difference between a spade and a shovel so let me clear up the difference first. In doing so it must be pointing that these are 'general' guidelines. The reason why spades and shovels get confused is because there is often very little difference but here are some fairly common differences. Let's take a look.



What makes a spade?

A spade generally has a relatively flat blade. Spades usually have straight edges and also usually have shorter handles to shovels. Spades are better suited to moving things, like soil, sand and mulch than they are to digging. This sometimes seems counter intuitive because a spades blade is generally smaller than a shovel and you would think bigger blade equals better moving capacity. The problem with this is sometimes moving bigger piles means more strain. Small handles and a smaller blade allow for more efficient moving, causing you to tire slower and lessen the risk of injury. Spades are also good for defining edges given most spades have a straight blade.

What makes a shovel?

A shovel usually has a longer handle, though short handle varieties are available. Shovels usually have a rounded or pointed blade, though the 'square blade' shovel is growing in popularity. Shovel blades are generally wider than a spade and are capable of moving more soil in one go, but as mentioned before this isn't necessarily always good. Shovels are the tool of choice for digging deep holes, hence the long handles and this is also the main reason behind having a larger blade.

What to buy first?

Different gardeners will recommend different things but my recommendation is to buy a spade first. Spades tend to be more versatile than shovels and are easier to use in tight spaces. Also, unless you plan to dig holes a metre or deeper a spade will do the job for you. Shovels are more specialised tools, spades more general.

Cost

If there is one tool that I recommend you splurge a bit on then it is when you buy a spade and/or a shovel. This is one tool that you really want to be purchasing 'for life'. I grew up using the same spade that my Dad bought at a young age. He still owns and uses that spade today. Spades and shovels are one of the most commonly used tools and the jobs they are used for are almost always heavy duty, occasionally being used to 'shift leaves'. It is for this reason you want a solid spade or shovel without even the smallest bit of plastic.

When shopping look for good quality steel or carbon fibre strengthened spades and shovels. Check anywhere there is a joint. Try flexing the handle and ascertaining where you think weak spots might be and how weak they appear under just a small amount of strain.

A good spade or shovel will quite possibly be upwards of \$60 but it will be the best \$60 you spend on a gardening tool, period.

Pruning Saw

Another must have tool for any gardener is a pruning saw. Sometimes plant or tree limbs are even too thick for loppers and you need to break out the saw. Now in theory any old saw would do, they all cut 'wood', but gardening pruning saws are designed to work best on living plants. When living plants are cut, they secrete a sticky residue, or 'sap' and this can cause difficulty for an ordinary saw. Pruning saws are designed with this in mind, made with either non-stick or low-stick teeth that will keep on cutting even when covered by tree sap. Pruning saws also generally come with a curved handle. This makes getting in and around tree limbs easier which is important because unless you have shaped your tree, it is often the most difficult to get to or most awkward limbs that you are trying to remove.



Another big bonus of a proper pruning saw over an ordinary saw is size and portability. Pruning saws often fold (though not always) and this is beneficial for 3 reasons;

1. Takes up less space;
2. Are safer, you won't risk cutting yourself reaching into your gardening tools.
3. Helps better protect the teeth, helping the tool to last longer.

What to look for

The first tip for anyone looking to buy a pruning saw is to spend that little bit extra and get one that folds up. Another very important aspect to shopping for pruning saws is buying one which has a replaceable blade. Though pruning saw blades can generally be sharpened, eventually a new blade will be needed. If the blade cannot be replaced then you will have to spend up big again on a new tool. However if the blade is replaceable this will significantly cut down the long term cost of maintaining your pruning saw.

A relatively recent improvement to the pruning saw range are blades called 'tri-cut' or something similar. Basically these are sharpened on 3 edges, like a triangle, and reportedly cut twice as fast. I myself have never owned a pruning saw with this kind of blade yet but every review I have read has strongly recommended them, so I'll recommend you look for a pruning saw with a tri-cut blade also.

I am probably beginning to sound like a broken record but try and stay away from pruning saws with lots of plastic pieces. Plastic makes the tool cheaper but it is also rare for tools with plastic to go the distance and last many years. In fact in many cases, manufacturers make tools out of plastic BECAUSE they won't last for years, forcing you to once again buy another tool in a couple of years. It makes sense for manufacturers, they need the business, but it is a shame that there are fewer and fewer top quality tools.

Cost

Pruning saw range in cost from about \$20 right up to \$200. To get a folding pruning saw with a tri-cut blade you are probably looking around the \$50 mark. Spending \$60-70 will get you a top notch tool, spending \$30-40 will get you a serviceable tool. Spending less than \$30 and you are probably getting a tool that will last a season or two before you have to spend another \$20-\$30 on a new tool.

Garden Fork

One tool that has become less and less common in the gardeners shed in recent years is the garden fork. However I strongly believe that it is an absolutely pivotal tool for any gardener to own. Garden forks are used for many different tasks. They can be used for shifting mulch and leaves, they can be used to help uproot difficult plants and they can be used to aerate or turn over soil. This is but a small number of the tasks that garden forks can be useful for.



What to look for

A lot of the tasks that you would use a garden fork for require a lot of force to be exerted on the tool and so it is imperative that you buy a good quality garden fork. As garden forks have become less and less popular the market has been flooded with cheap and nasty alternatives. Just last week I was helping a friend out and was using their tools. The fork was brand new. I placed it into the ground in a common manner, placed a mild amount of force on the tool and the plastic handle snapped right off.

The BEST garden forks are 'forged'. That is they are made from one solid piece of metal, forged when heated. The very best in my opinion are forged steel with a soft rubber coated handle. If you are not buying a forged garden fork make sure you check out how many joins the tool has. Is there a join between the prongs and the shaft? Is there a join between the shaft and the handle? Joins are points of weakness, the more joins there are, the weaker the tool will be.

Many aluminium alloy forks are coming out with extremely high %'s of aluminium in the alloy. Aluminium is a very malleable metal which means it bends and twists easily. Many good tools are made of aluminium alloys HOWEVER you really need to make sure the alloy has enough other metals to strengthen the tool. Feel the prongs on the fork, put some pressure on them. If you can bend them yourself (which isn't out of the question with cheap tools today) then think what using them will do?

Make sure the handle feels comfortable and the shaft is a reasonable length. Short handles make the tool more versatile as it'll be easier to manage in tight spaces but it also means the work will be harder. Longer handles provide more leverage which can make the job easier, depending on what you are doing, but also make it harder to use in tight spaces. Think about how you think you will be using the tool and decide, based on that, what you need most.

Cost

My advice with garden forks is not to buy cheap. As I mentioned above, in recent years many cheap brands have entered the market but the tools they sell are shocking. The garden fork is one tool that is very commonly made for 'cheap' prices but these tools simply will not stand the test of time. Anything less than \$30-\$40 and I would suggest you are probably throwing your money away. Having said that, garden forks that are around \$30-\$40 will likely work well. Though a seriously good quality forged fork will set you back likely \$70+, a strong mid range fork with 1, maybe 2 joins will probably do the job. Let me re-iterate though, don't buy the cheap imported forks!

Garden Rake

When it comes to gardening tools, many decisions have to be made. Often there are various 'types' of each garden tool, some of which I have covered throughout this series. However, in my opinion there is no garden tool whereby the different 'types' are so different than the humble garden rake. As is often the case the 'names' for the various types of garden rakes differs depending on where you are but for the sake of this article I'll be talking about 3 different types, leaf rakes, lawn rakes and garden rakes. This last type is a little confusing, given it shares its name with the overarching type but I think you'll understand the difference by the end of the article.



Leaf Rake

The name of each of the three types of rake I am talking about give you a rough idea of their purpose. A leaf rake is mostly used for...raking up leaves. Some places in the world require leaf rakes more than others but they are generally a useful tool to have. When buying a leaf rake there is one main variable to consider, how light is the rake. Quite simply, leaves themselves are not heavy so you do not need a heavy duty rake to rake them up. What you do need is a tool that you can use for long periods of time and not tire too easily. Especially during autumn (or fall as American's call it), raking leaves can be a big task and so you want a tool that is light weight, flexible and has a broad head. You also want very small gaps between the rakes prongs so that leaves can't slip between them. Leaf rakes are about the ONLY garden tool that I will recommend buying something with plastic as plastic heads are generally the lightest and so make for a good leaf rake.

Lawn rake

A lawn rake is actually very similar to a garden rake, in fact many people don't differentiate between them because a lawn rake CAN be used as a leaf rake. The main difference here is that a lawn rake needs to have a stronger, sturdier and therefore generally heavier head. Lawn rakes are usually used to remove dead grass on the top layer. Sometimes even dead grass can be well rooted and so you need a little bit of strength in the head to help pull out the grass. It is important when choosing a lawn rake that you get one with a solid join between the head and the handle as this is where all the pressure will be. If you choose a lawn rake with a weak join, the join may give way and leave the dead grass embedded in the ground!

Garden rake

A garden rake is really quite different to both a lawn and leaf rake. A garden rake is usually used in soil, often for moving or leveling soil. This job requires that soil can both be pushed by the rake but also not provide too much resistance. As such a garden rake has fewer prongs on the head and they are spread out more. Lawn and leaf rakes have long prongs that mostly go in the same direction as the handle where as a garden rake has prongs that are totally on a 90 degree angle. Garden rakes need to be sturdy and they need to be made of really solid materials. A good garden rake is like a good garden spade or shovel, if you buy the right one it really could last for life. Don't scrimp when it comes to choosing a garden rake!

Cost

Leaf Rakes

Definitely the cheapest as far as rakes go. Probably the only garden tool I'll recommend where you can buy the cheapest tool available and it will probably be ok AS LONG as you only use it for its purpose, raking leaves. The more expensive leaf rakes only cost more because they improve the ease of use or are slightly lighter. Still, a \$10 leaf rake will do the job.

Lawn Rake

Because a lawn rake needs to be stronger than a leaf rake the cost is slightly higher. I've been solid lawn rakes for as little as \$20 and a lawn rake CAN be used as a leaf rake, it'll just take more effort since a lawn rake will be heavier.

Garden Rake

This is the most costly rake. A budget garden rake still shouldn't be less than \$25 and a solid garden rake will probably set you back \$30+. Spending \$40-\$50 will make it more likely that you are buying a tool for life.

Conclusion

Green thumbs face many tough choices when it comes to gardening. What plants will work best? How big should the garden beds be? What garden features do you add? However the simple fact of the matter is that every garden decision apart from the most basic gardening revolves around using garden tools. Making garden beds, laying pavers, planting and maintaining those plants all require you to have and efficiently use the right garden tools. It is for this very reason that buying the right gardening tools is so very important.

Hopefully this ebook has outlined what you need to know when it comes to buying the most basic gardening tools. This ebook is by no means exhaustive but it covers the most basic tools that you could need. In fact with the tools covered in this ebook, most gardening tasks can be completed with great results.

Most people don't have the money to go out and buy an entire garden shed of tools. Garden tools are acquired over time. If the right tools are bought then it is very possible you won't need to buy the same tools again for years. Don't feel the need to buy every gardening tool in one hit because to do this will most likely require you to buy lesser quality tools. Spread it out over a period of time. Perhaps buy the tools you require as you need them or consider buying a few and temporarily hiring others. Just buy good quality tools, it will be well worth it.

On the next page you will find my *BONUS* review. I chose to review an electric hedge trimmer because this is a tool that can significantly improve the efficiency for garden maintenance for most people. Having an electric hedge trimmer may reduce the amount of time you spend trimming your garden by a significant amount, so once you feel you have the required basic tools I recommend you consider buying an electric hedge trimmer.

Electric Hedge Trimmer *BONUS*

A hedge trimmer is used to lightly prune hedges and shrubs to keep them looking good. The job can be done very well with manual shears and I myself prefer the control and feel provided by manual shears, but for ongoing maintenance of medium to large gardens, an electric trimmer can significantly reduce the time it takes to maintain a garden.



What to look for

The very first consideration to make when buying an electric hedge trimmer is how do you want your trimmer to be powered? There are 3 options and each option will suit a very different clientele. Those three options are petrol, battery and electric power chord.

Petrol Electric trimmer

Petrol trimmers usually are the best choice for high use. They have the freedom of a battery powered hedge trimmer and the power of an electric chord powered trimmer. Obviously they need to be refuelled every now and then but this is less frequent than how often battery operated trimmers need to be recharged. Simply put, petrol electric trimmers are the 'best' but because of this they are also the most expensive. Really, unless you are running a gardening business or have a vast backyard that doesn't allow the use of a power chord you can probably utilise a battery or electric power chord trimmer for the job, both of which are cheaper options.

Battery

Battery powered electric trimmers are much like cordless drills. They provide a very high quality operation but only for a limited time. How long the battery lasts after each charge depends on how hard you are working the tool, how much you are trimming off the hedges and how thick the foliage that you are trimming is. If you only have a small amount to trim then a battery powered electric trimmer will probably do the job for you and they are generally the cheapest option. In fact most people I know who use an electric hedge trimmer own a battery powered tool.

Electric chord trimmer

For gardeners with larger gardens to maintain it is probably worth spending a little bit more and buying an electric chord trimmer. Though being tied to a chord makes the tool less manoeuvrable, you don't have to worry about the tool running out of power with higher use. Still, the manoeuvrability issues are big and so the decision for anyone needing higher use, petrol or electric chord? This will usually be a cost decision.

Cost

Obviously, being a powered tool, the costs are on the high end of garden tools. A cheap, battery operated hedge trimmer may be as cheap as \$100+. A middle of the range hedge trimmer will be \$200-\$300 and top of the range electric hedge trimmers will set you back \$400+.

Good luck with all your future gardening tool acquisitions!