

January 15, 2010



## Tip of the Week



**Mary, Mary quite contrary:  
How do your shovels grow?  
With caked-on mud and rusty heads  
And broken handles in a row!**

If your garden tools got shoved in the shed without their final fall clean-up, now is a good time to haul them out and get them ready for spring. Here are some tips for basic and more advanced maintenance to make sure your landscape/garden tools are ready to dig when it's time to plant.

### Supplies:

- Rags
- Steel wool
- Mineral spirits
- File

Since rust is the culprit that makes tools dull and wears them out, keeping shovel and hoe heads rust-free is the key to a long-lived implement. Wipe off the worst grime with a rag. Then scrub the tool head with steel wool to remove

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rust. Finally, use mineral oil to wipe down both the metal head and wood handle. Repeat this process during the growing season to keep tools in tip-top condition.

**Keep the blade sharp.**

Tools perform best when they are sharp. Have a file on hand to sharpen the blade edge on a regular basis. This maintains a tool that is most efficient for the job. A really dull blade may need to be sharpened on a grinding wheel.

**Replace loose, broken or cracked handles.** Using tools with damaged handles is a safety hazard. If the tool head is still good, take the sustainable option and just replace the handle. Fiberglass handles are a great option because they hold up better and are more weather resistant than wood.

**Help for tools:** shops that rent tools and small equipment often offer services to sharpen blades on a grinding wheel and replace handles. Replacing handles yourself can take from 30 minutes to two hours, so it may be more time efficient to send this work out.

**Need help with your landscape needs?** Go to [www.alcc.com](http://www.alcc.com) and click on *Find a Pro!*

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