KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“Tooling Around Your Garden”

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Experienced gardeners rely on a few "go-to" tools that make digging, planting and weeding easier in the vegetable garden. But how do new gardeners decide from the many tools offered in a garden or hardware store?

Here are some good ideas for must-have dirt tools for the home garden:

* **Spading fork –**The single most useful, versatile tool for tillage and preparing the soil is a spading fork, a robust pitchfork-type tool. This long-handled or D-handled tool helps to "fluff" up the soil to prepare it for planting and also mixes compost, lime, and fertilizer at least eight to 12 inches into the soil – if you add amendments before you dig. This tool also makes it easier to pull out weeds and get vegetable plants ready for the compost bin. Don’t confuse the spading fork with the pitch fork used to carry hay or straw – the spading fork is a digging tool and the flat tines are spaced more closely and aren’t sharp.
* **Hard rake –**After you till the soil with a spading fork, prepare seed beds with a rake. It helps to chop up clods of soil and get rid of rocks. Some gardeners call this rake a “tooth” or a bow rake in contrast to a flexible leaf rake.
* **Hori-hori knife –**The hori-hori knife is indispensable to the vegetable gardener. It’s a Japanese hand tool that looks like something a warrior might pull from their belt – a large knife with a serrated edge. It's great for popping out dandelions and prying out the wide-ranging roots of grass weeds. Many gardeners keep it handy to cut open amendment bags, dig out weeds in the sidewalk cracks and as a trowel for planting. The very first season you own it, you’ll discover new ways to use it – I found it to be perfect for removing hardened soil in garden containers after a long winter of freeze and thaw.
* **Scuffle or hula hoe –**These long-handled hoes have a triangular-shaped or hoop shaped blade that makes them perfect for scraping away young annual weeds before they can grow strong enough to compete with your crops. They can be found in long or short handled sizes and are easy to keep sharp with a metal file.

Some optional tools can make the gardening chores much easier:

* **Twine or garden tape** – Sometimes you need another hand and twine is just the thing to help. My practical husband bought me a large roll of twine years ago and it sits out on my bench, ready to tie up my tomatoes, lash together three stakes for a pea vine or control the collection of sticks and stakes in the corner of the shed. Great stuff!
* **Hand trowel with a measure** – I bought a bulb trowel years ago to ensure they were planted at the right depth but I’ve found the measurements in the blade are useful for many things including the depth of the hole I’ve dug for transplants and the distance between new plants.
* **Five-gallon bucket –**Buckets are helpful to carry your hand tools and also for transporting compost, weeds and soil. I’ve found that a bright orange bucket is much easier to see across the yard in the fading twilight at the end of the workday.

Once you’ve invested in quality gardening tools, be sure to give them the care they deserve. Clean the dirt off when you put them away and sharpen the cutting edges of tools regularly with a small metal file. Dull tools can be dangerous to the gardener and damaging to the plant. By using a wire brush to clean your tools, you’ll extend their life considerably. The metal can rust and weed seeds can collect in the dirt left on the tools, waiting to be redistributed on your next gardening workday.

For more information on this and many other gardening topics, visit our website [www.gocomga.com](http://www.gocomga.com) and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV’s *The Point*.

Resources:

Using garden tools if you face physical challenges:

EM 8499 [Making Gardening Easier: Gardening Hints for People with Arthritis](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em8499)

EM 8500 [Making Gardening Easier: Gardening Adaptations for People with Gripping and Lifting Problems](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em8500)

EM 8501 [Making Gardening Easier: Gardening Strategies for People with Heart and Lung Problems](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em8501)

EM 8504 [Making Gardening Easier: Adapting Garden Tools to Overcome Physical Challenges](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/catalog/files/project/pdf/em8504.pdf)