

Tools for the Gardener

With a friend of mine I've taken over management of the Garden Shop at the Albuquerque Garden Center. This has given me a chance to think of the products and books I think are worth buying and at the same time it has given me a topic to cover in this article.

As most of you know, you can buy cheap or you can buy quality – at a price. If you're going to do your own gardening, I recommend spending a little more to get something that is made better and lasts longer. That also means you'll have to take care of your tools. So clean and dry them after each use and don't use them for purposes other than what they're designed. If the pruners say $\frac{3}{4}$ " , don't try to cut 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " branches!

My thoughts on the products you need to have include the following items:

- Bypass, not anvil pruners. If you can afford them, Felco is the brand of choice. You can get left handed or right handed and you can also select small hands or large hands. If you don't have good hand strength I would recommend the Fiskars PowerGear products. They're designed to reduce the pain of repetitive motions.
- Loppers – an arborist friend of mine says never use these on trees because they compress the wood. They're handy for breaking up the trimmings into something you can put into your garbage or if you're a good person, into your compost. I prefer the 18" Fiskars PowerGear again. And the shorter ones work for me. I use them on shrubs, a pruning saw for trees.
- Pruning saw – needed only if you have mature shrubs and trees to prune. Silky is the brand of choice by arborists – Zubat is the one I have, but you can get Corona or Fiskars too. And you can get folding saws or ones in a sheath. That's your choice – just keep them clean and don't use them incorrectly.
- Trowel - I like an all-purpose one with markings and serrated edges. The markings are often available only on the bulb planting trowel s also known as transplanters. Fiskars or OXO have good ones.
- Hand rake for cleaning under and around shrubs – OXO makes a flexible rake that people in the garden clubs love.
- Trake – very popular tool, it's a combination trowel and rake (cultivator not really a rake). Also beloved by garden club members.
- Three piece garden tool set – another way to buy multiple tools at one time, but as separate tools. Fiskars has a set you can purchase with a trowel, a transplanter (bulb trowel), and a cultivator.
- Hori-hori – the best weeding knife especially for grasses. Expensive, but worth it. Recommended by master gardeners.
- Ho-Mi digger, a Korean tool, that I love for planting in our soil, and removing irrigation staples (not a manufacturer recommended use). It also works like a bigger deeper trowel to scoop dirt away from the planting area.
- Micro-tip pruning snips – useful if you do floral designs. Claus or ARS make good ones.
- Kangaroo 10 gal. garden container – great for hauling lightweight material, not wet or heavy material. Fiskars is the brand I like. It's collapsible so takes up very little space in the garage.

- Garden bucket caddy – you’d think a tool belt is what you want, but it’s hard to lean over and work with one on so I prefer the bucket caddy which holds tools and a cell phone wrapped around a 5 gallon bucket. The tools are always handy and you don’t leave them somewhere in the yard to rust and be forgotten.
- Kneeling pad – larger is better. They work on any surface and are easily portable.
- Hat – wide brim is what you want. It has to allow for good air flow and have a strap to keep it on in the wind. Tilley is the premium brand, but Sloggers has a good one too. Washable is nice.
- Speaking of Sloggers, they have some good garden clogs. Comfortable, but not a problem to get wet and easy to clean.
- Table top potting tray – if you transplant or pot a lot of plants, this handy item keeps the mess inside the tray and makes clean-up so much easier.
- Trugs – plastic containers to hold stuff that you need to haul around the landscape. Good with wet stuff because they’re made of a plastic/rubber material. Come in different sizes and colors – easy clean.

Bigger tools to own:

- Shovels are handy, a slightly pointed one for shoveling dirt – sized to your height and with a lip for your foot. A coal shovel is good for gravel, something you can pick up on a flat surface. There are some ergonomic handled ones available as well. Avoid wooden handles if you can because they shrink and come out of their holder in our environment. A Texas sharpshooter can’t be beat if you need to go deep – it’s narrow and pointed. Watering the soil first always makes working in decomposed granite easier. Waiting a day gives it time to seep deeper.
- Rakes – a garden rake if you’re growing in sizeable beds. Fall style usually fan shaped or ergonomic for leaves. My handiest one is adjustable so you can have a small fan to get under shrubs or a larger one for leaves. And it stores compactly.
- Garden Fork – great for dividing plants like daylilies without destroying their roots. There’s also a style that you use to open up the soil without breaking the layers – called a digging fork. It has a place to rest your foot so you can enter the soil and then open it up without lifting or turning the soil over.
- Circle hoe or hula hoe – a weeding tool that cuts the roots below the surface. The circle hoe creates divots. The hula hoe goes about an inch below the surface and slice off roots. Both are what I call stand-up weeders. If you have a large surface area, the hula hoe is probably better. If you have a few weeds, I prefer the circle hoe.

I know there are other tools and almost everyone has their favorite. This is a list of my favorites.