

# WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW?

By Skip Mahon

The other day I was standing in front of my garden storage shed, just about ready to lock it up for the winter. I paused thinking that there is something else I should do but I couldn't quite remember why I was standing there. Has that ever happened to you? After a moment, the light bulb went on! It dawned on me that if I clean and sharpen my tools I will be ready to go for the next season as soon as the first shoot sprouts out of the garden or the first bud emerges from my trees. But what do I need to do to get ready? Well here is my checklist that I put together to organize my tasks.

## GARDEN TOOL MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST

- **Assemble** my tools for the tasks
  - 5-gal. bucket and water source
  - Stiff bristle brush (plastic or wire bristles)
  - Oil for tools (boiled linseed oil, WD-40, cooking oil, motor oil or spent motor oil)
    - **Hint:** I prefer boiled linseed oil because it is more environmentally friendly and can be used on both metal and wood.
  - Turpentine or paint thinner
  - Steel wool or sandpaper
  - File (preferably with a handle)
  - Whetstone, oil stone or honing stone
  - Old rags or towels
  
- **Larger hand tools and smaller hand tools used in the soil** (Spades, shovels, turning forks, mattocks, hoes, pole saws, axes, trowels, weeders, garden knife, Hori Hori, etc.)
  - Soak in bucket of water to remove soil
  - Brush tool with stiff brush to remove remaining soil
  - Rinse
  - Disinfect tool, as appropriate.
  - Air dry tool or dry with old towel.
  - Use steel wool or sandpaper to remove all rust from tool.
  - Use file to restore bevel to tool.
    - **Hint:** Try to follow the original bevel on the edge of the tool with the file.
    - **Hint:** To sharpen saws with a file, remove the blade from the handle if it can be removed and fasten the blade in a vice and file in the same direction as the original sharpened edge of the blade.
    - **Hint:** Use turpentine or paint thinner to clean sap or resin off of the used saw blade; then dry with a rag or towel before sharpening.
    - **Hint:** Having a second blade to swap for the used blade will allow you to sharpen the used blade while the snow is flying and it will be ready to swap out next season when it is needed.

- Use whetstone to sharpen the edge of an axe after restoring the bevel with the file.
  - Sand any rough wooden handles.
    - **Hint:** Use 80 grit sandpaper for splinters or “raised grain” in handle: finish with 120-1560 grit sandpaper.
  - Wipe metal and wooden surfaces of the tool with oil. Let stand 15 minutes and then wipe off with rag or old towel.
- **Smaller hand tools not used in soil** (Hand axe, Loppers, Pruners, Hedge shears, Scissors, Snips, Pruning saws, etc.)
- Use turpentine or paint thinner to clean sap or resin off of the tool blade;
  - Disinfect tool, as appropriate.
  - Air dry tool or dry with old towel.
  - Use steel wool or sandpaper to remove all rust from tool.
  - Use file to restore bevel to tool, if needed, following the original bevel of the cutting tool.
  - Use whetstone to sharpen the edge of the cutting tool after restoring the bevel with the file.
  - Sand any rough wooden handles.
    - **Hint:** Use 80 grit sandpaper for splinters or “raised grain” in handle: finish with 120-1560 grit sandpaper.
  - Lubricate hinge or fulcrum point with oil.
  - Wipe all metal and wooden surfaces of the tool with oil. Let stand 15 minutes and then wipe off with rag or old towel.
- **Power tools** (Garden tractors, lawn mowers, tillers, string trimmers, chain saws, etc.)
- Either, run the tool until all the fuel mixture is used or fill tank with fuel mixed with fuel stabilizer to proper proportions..
    - **Hint:** Mix fuel stabilizer into any fuel you intend to store over the winter.
  - Check starter cord, check and lubricate all cables per tool instructions, check all bolts and tighten or replace as necessary, and check any electrical connections and replace as needed (or discard and replace tool). .
  - Clean undersurfaces of tool and tines of tillers.
    - **Hint:** For tillers remove the blades or tines and follow the maintenance checklist for larger hand tools.
  - Clean or replace any air filter.
  - Change oil and lubricate moving parts per tool instructions.
  - Change or sharpen blades and replace cutting line spools on string trimmers
    - **Hint:** Having a second blade to swap for the used blade will allow you to sharpen the used blade while the snow is flying and it will be ready to swap out next season when it is needed.
    - **Hint:** Having several replacement spools for the string trimmer to swap for the empty spools will allow you to rewind the spent spools during your “down time” and they will be ready to swap out next time when they are needed.
- **Larger equipment** (Garden carts, wheel barrows, wagons, leaf sweepers, etc.)
- Clean off all accumulated soil with water and a stiff bristle brush.

- Dry with rags or old towel
- Use steel wool or sandpaper to remove all rust.
- Check and tighten all bolts, replace any missing or broken parts
- Lubricate moving parts and joints per equipment instructions.
- Wipe metal and wooden surfaces of the equipment with oil. Let stand 15 minutes and then wipe off with rag or old towel.

➤ **Relax**

- Put feet up.
- Read garden catalogues for next year.
- Plan
- Dream.

**Happy Gardening!**

**Sources:**

1. *Cleaning Garden Tools*, The Green Mountain Gardner, University of Vermont Extension  
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2. *Garden Tool Maintenance*, Olbirch Botanical Gardens Madison, WI  
(<http://www.olbirch.org/education/toolmaintenance.cfm>)
3. *Garden Tool Care and Maintenance*, Garden Tool Company  
(<https://www.gardentoolcompany.com/pages/garden-tool-care-and-maintenance>)