

Favorite Tools & Tips

Greater Rochester Perennial Society, November 11, 2011

Introduction

When our Vice President and program chair extraordinaire suggested a meeting where members would bring a favorite tool or gardening tip to share, who knew it would become personal. Favorite tools have lasted longer than marriages, and have been wielded in the early stages of healing following a serious accident.

Some tips were amazing because they were created out of something so ordinary that it should have been obvious to each of us.

Many hand tools were imported, exotic and probably fashioned first by a hard working farmer.

The most popular tools are about control; control of weeds, control of overgrowth, and control of the end or beginning of the growing season.

We like our power tools, too; lawn mowers, flame throwers, reciprocating saws.

The program was informative, comical and inspirational. But, that said, the GRPS **does not endorse anything** here, because these are the contributions of our members. GRPS merely offers these tips and tools for your study and possible use.

How to sharpen a pruner by Elmer.

Laurie introduced Elmer and said that he holds a "Black Belt in Pruning." He prunes the lilacs in Highland Park, Rochester, New York.

Use a thin file with a diamond surface. Hold the pruner against the edge of a table and only sharpen the beveled side of the anvil, the moving part. The other blade does not get sharpened. Repeatedly stroke the blade from the center to the edge in one stroke, maintaining the angle of the existing bevel. After many strokes, carefully test with a finger to see if it is getting sharper. At the end, sweep off the burr with one stroke that is created on the back side of the blade. Elmer uses the DTM Diamond Flat File item # FF, \$24.95. www.sharpeningsupplies.com/Dia-Sharp-Diamond

POWER TOOLS

A rechargeable reciprocating saw, the Black and Decker Firestorm 18 volt battery with a piranha wood/pruning blade. Commonly known as a "Sawzall", it will cut through big vines, trees, thick stems and more. It's very handy for pruning heavy branches up to 3" diameter.

Lawn mower. Use it to mow down most everything in the fall. Keep the wheels at the highest setting, wear safety glasses, and keep areas to be mowed free of rocks. Tip up as you go for high plants, if the motor begins to stall out; restart if it dies. Bag the weeds. Plants can be instant compost and there is no spring clean-up. Don't mow anything that doesn't die all the way back to the ground like roses and azaleas.

Burnsomatic Propane torches, one longer small nozzle, one shorter with broader nozzle. Great weed killers, very specific and quick. Great to use on weeds & grass

growing through pavement and walk ways. Kills roots as well. Work best on young weeds. Also a volunteer fireman, this gardener likes to garden and also stomp out small fires.

HAND TOOLS

Wear gloves and use a big kitchen knife with serrated edge to cut through most anything.

A.M. Leonard Soil Knife with a serrated edge and ruler. Dig and measure. Good for general weeding, digging holes, plants that are root bound – cutting or roughing up roots, digging holes for bulbs, cutting twine.

Japanese Weeder. This tool has a triangular shaped head on a 16” handle. It’s perfect for weeding, planting, digging and edging. It can be right or left handed. Buy from Smith & Hawkin.

Root hook/separator from the Bonsai Mart online of Bill Valvanis at the International Bonsai Arboretum. It’s made from a steel tube, sort of S shaped with a sharp end. It will easily comb out the roots of “root bound” plants with little damage.

A camping shovel, which is comparatively small, is useful for many digging tasks. Keep it in the car to have on hand when a friend offers a plant that must be dug up.

A hoop hoe with a long handle, excellent for weeding and has survived two marriages.

A long handled Korean plow is a great weeder.

A soil scoop with a jagged edge and sharp point, \$22 at Wayside.

A hand edger, the kind you push into the ground with your foot. A nice edge can be created in any shape.

A small shovel available from Harris Garden Center in Penfield.

A triangular hoe with sharp edges, great for weeding, it’s sharp enough to cut tap roots, and good for edging.

A stand up dandelion remover. Push the tool into the ground and the insert grabs the roots.

Bahco ergonomic pruner, @\$80. It tips down and rolls to the left. Can be sized to your hand – small medium & large. The blade can be sized; available left and right handed. The rolling handle is comfortable. Replacement blades are available.

A mini tiller. It has an adze on one end and 3 heavy tines on the other end. It’s an excellent chopper.

A Korean hoe.

Lots of pointy Dollar Store scissors.

A long, narrow stainless steel shovel which is great for prying up ants and dividing hosta.

A Japanese hand tool which can dig deep, and is excellent for cutting weeds. Pic can get the tool for you from a friend.

TIPS

Use a lot of compost. Mulch the leaves with the lawn mower. Use cut grass with no weed killer, etc. I will add aged manure on occasion. Good organic matter enriches the nutrients in the soil and the gardens come alive.

The old adage “let it seed – seven year weed” comes to mind in the spring when the garlic mustard starts taking over my garden. So before they even begin to seed, it’s best to get the weeds out ASAP. The 50 plus year old seed bucket at Cornell is the best example of the wonder and aggravation of the power of seeds. Every year, they stir this bucket, add some water and step back and watch as nearly “ancient” seeds germinate. It never fails.

Do your tall variety sedums always flop by the time they are in flower? Trim them down half way in late June with hedge trimmers. The sedums will grow strong and dense and still flower. Flower heads may be smaller, but there will be more of them, so still a lot of color. This works on Autumn Joy, Neon, Matrona, Vera Jameson, etc.

Use Epsom Salts on roses, perennials, shrubs and lawn to improve growth and flowering. Used in a spray, it helps plants process nutrients. Use on everything but sage.

Use a Parmesan cheese shaker to put various fertilizers in. The tops close and the contents don’t spill out. The smaller container with the shaker top makes it easier to take into the garden. Put a label on each container and cover with clear packing tape.

Re-blooming amaryllis. Select bulbs that are dry with no mold or rot and with the tip of the flower showing. Plant high in potting soil in a clay pot; they do not have to be removed. When blooming is finished, cut off the spent flower at the top of the stem. Cut the stem off when dried out. Put outside for the summer in bright light, keep watered and fertilize. Cut back when in danger of frost & bring inside. Store in a cold spot for several weeks, but don’t let them freeze. Do not water while they are resting. When ready to re-start, water heavily and put in bright light. Water when dry to the touch. They will bloom in about 6 weeks and will probably need to be staked. Let bulblets grow quite large before removing.

Use your eyes, hands and feet.

Make a tool caddy out of a 96 ounce Clorox bottle. Cut away underneath the handle on both sides to create the opening. It’s handy for carrying small tools around the garden.

Tie plastic ribbon to every tool to keep them from getting lost in the garden. Use a large empty cat litter bucket to carry around all your small tools and garden kneeler.

Start a garden diary. Get a nice book. Record the things you’re likely to forget -- what did well, what you might do next year, when plants bloom, what are good locations for each, the random thoughts that come up. This was given by our special guest Colleen Plimpton, author of *Mentors in the Garden of Life*, and someone who has appeared on *Good Morning America*.

Make a pocket apron to wear in the garden.

Use Crazy glue instead of a Band-Aid for finger cuts.

Get a long handled shop magnet from Lowes or Home Depot and use it to find lost tools in the garden and yard.

Use colored ribbons or spray paint tool handles with bright colors.

The End, an Inspirational Story

Our gardener friend broke her neck in 2006. She sustained brain injuries and was in a coma. It took 5 months to heal and get her legs working. As soon as she was able to walk, her eagerness led her into the garden.

With a Korean hoe in hand, still in a stiff body cast which did not bend at the waist, she headed outside. Using a kneeler, she struggled to get to her knees and then fell smack straight over, flat on her stomach.

And with outstretched arm, she began to weed.