

YARD & GARDEN NEWSLETTER- APRIL 2017**Gardening tools 101****Geri Howieson, River Valley Master Gardener**

Garden tools have evolved a lot over the years from the digging sticks of antiquity to today's highly specialized tools. Every season brings new garden gadgets and buying them can become addictive. Even among the basic garden tools, you are bound to find a wide variety of designs and sizes. There is a reason for so many options - using the right tool for the right job makes your work easier and more efficient. Here are some of the different tools you might find.

The shovel is the mainstay and workhorse of the garden shed. A round point shovel is great for digging, lifting and throwing. A square point shovel (also known as a scoop shovel) is excellent for moving materials.

Spades are essentially a smaller version of the shovel with a flatter blade. The biggest differences between shovels and spades are found in the handle/shaft and the blade. Both can be found with wood or fiberglass handles, and with carbon or stainless steel blades. Weight is mostly dependent on materials used, as is the cost. Weight and cost will also vary with the intended use of the tool; those used for specialty purposes will generally cost more.

Rakes take the concept of the human hand and finger dexterity to a bigger scale. They come in all sizes and styles. The larger the rake the heavier it will be. The **leaf rake** is for movement of leaves, grass clippings and other material. This rake is also available as a hand tool. A **thatch rake** is specifically designed to scratch into turf and remove thatch. A **garden rake** has strong tines designed for moving or removing debris or working the soil for planting. The top edge can be used for leveling the soil before planting. Garden rakes come in two types, flat (a T-shaped head) and bow (the head is attached by two curved steel supports).

Forks are designed in different styles with different numbers and sizes of tines.

The **hayfork** has round tines and is useful for moving materials such as compost, mulch, brush and hay. A **spading fork** has flat tines that are great for turning soil, lifting and separating plants. This tool is also used to aerate and relieve soil compaction. The **hand fork** is a smaller version of the spading fork and can be used for weeding. These forks can range in size for 11" to 24" and usually have three tines.

Hoes Another simple and ancient tool, the hoe is designed for weeding and light groundbreaking. There are many different head sizes and shapes. **Regular garden hoes** have square or rectangular blade at a right angle to the handle for chopping. Blades can vary in size. The **warren hoe** has a triangular shape with pointed v-shaped blade that is designed for planting. The **weeding hoe** has a flat blade on one end for chopping and pointed tips on the other for pulling weeds by the roots. An **action hoe** pivots back and forth under the soil; the blade cuts on the push or pull stroke. This hoe is also made in different handle lengths from 12" to 60".

Cultivators are designed to scratch the soil either prior to planting or around the plants while growing. They are available either with long handles or as hand tools.



Edgers are made in various styles and shapes, from rectangular to half-moon. The intent is to cut a clean line where a lawn transition occurs, such as a sidewalk or planting bed.

Hand Trowels are excellent tools for gardening in containers and small spaces; mixing potting media; planting seedlings; and digging out weeds. Most have a wooden handle and broad or narrow blades. Blade widths come in various sizes and lengths depending upon the intended use of the tool. Narrow, long blades are good for planting bulbs and digging up weeds while wider blades are useful for transplanting small potted plants to the garden and mixing potting soil. Longer handled trowels with smaller blades are great for use between plants and shrubs.

Weeder This is commonly known as a dandelion digger, it looks like a notched screwdriver. It's made to penetrate the soil and remove weed roots from deep in the ground. The CobraHead is a grappling hook with a handle and a flattened, diamond-shaped head. This simple design lets gardeners insert the hook end underneath dense, matted roots and yank them up more efficiently than with any other tool.

Pruners, Loppers, Saws and Sheers are a diverse group of cutting tools which are used to trim and shape plants, deadhead, prune out dead or damaged foliage and small branches, and cut back perennials. **Bypass Pruners** are the most popular. You get a clean cut from two curved blades that move past each other just like a pair of scissors. One of the blades is sharp and cuts as it moves by a thicker unsharpened blade. **Anvil Pruners** have a one straight blade that cuts as it closes onto a flat edge giving an action similar to a knife on a chopping board. They are usually slightly bulkier than bypass pruners, which can make them tricky to get into tight areas. Because the blade often crushes stems when cutting, these are best used on dead wood rather than live plants. Look for blades made of high quality, hardened or carbon steel - they last longer and are less likely to nick or need frequent sharpening. Many pruning shears have a spring between the two handles that pushes the handles/blades apart when you relax your grip. This reduces the workload and hand fatigue. There are two common types of springs: coiled metal and wire springs. Both work well but look for one that's tightly attached to the handles so it doesn't accidentally pop off or pulled off by branches when pruning trees or shrubs. Consider both how well the pruning

shears fit in your hand and how large a diameter branch they can comfortably cut. Most pruners will manage about a ½" branch, but some can cut up to 1" or more. If you will be doing a lot of pruning, check the weight of the pruners as heavier ones will cause more fatigue. **Loppers** are pruners with long handles. **Pole pruners** have a rope and a pulley to operate the cutter from ground level. There are two types of **Pruning Saws**. The standard saw works best in a restricted area. The saw cuts on the pull stroke. The blades may be curved or straight. The bow saw is used on large limbs in unrestricted area. The more teeth the blade has the more precise the cut. **Grass Sheers** are good for trimming where a string trimmer could damage bark. **Hedge Sheers** are used for trimming shrubs and hedges. A **Scissors** can be used for cutting flowers and cutting string or tape.

If you take your gardening seriously, consider buying only the best tools. The money will be well spent in terms of how long the tools last. **The best-quality tools** are made of steel and have handles made of quality hardwood, ash handles being the most durable. Some tools are available with more than one handle style. Make your choice based on your personal preference and the level of use your tool will have. Long handles offer longer reach and more leverage, but require more arm strength. Short handles are best for restricted work areas, but they require more leg strength. They may be T or D-shaped. Grips give you more control over the tool. Cushioned or padded handles are available on some tools, making the work a little easier on the hands.

Handles are attached to the head by sockets, a metal sleeve that extends from the head and wraps around the handle. This type of connection is usually found on less expensive tools. In high quality tools, handles are attached to a metal sleeve wrapped around the handle and reinforced with a rivet or screw for additional strength. Tang and ferrule is a metal shaft (tang) extending from the tool head and inserted into a metal sleeve (ferrule) on the handle. Forged tools are heat tempered and stronger than tools that are stamped from metal sheets.

Part of selecting any tool is the "How does it feel in my hand?" test. When choosing, try to imagine how the tool will feel after a few hours of use. Remember, as the size of the tool increases, the weight of the tool also increases. Larger tools are efficient; just remember to choose one that won't wear you out too quickly.

March Weed of the Month: Baby's Breath

Article from Minnesota Department of Agriculture:

Last month we learned about how the cut-flower industry can be a pathway for new invasive plant introductions. A good example of a plant that got its start in the Midwest through this inroad is baby's breath, *Gypsophila paniculata*.

Baby's breath has become a problem across the northern and western U.S. and is listed as a noxious weed by California and Washington. It is known to occur in Minnesota, but the exact distribution is unknown. The [Minnesota Invasive Species Advisory Committee](#) (MISAC) lists it as a species to "Watch," and notes that it is known "to be problematic under certain conditions, but the invasiveness...in all Minnesota conditions has yet to be determined." Baby's breath has not yet been petitioned for review to the Minnesota Noxious Weed Advisory Committee (NWAC) for risk assessment and evaluation as a potential state listed noxious weed, but is on their list of potential species to review over the next three years.

Baby's breath is a perennial herbaceous plant that can reach heights of 3 feet. It has a highly branched, bushy appearance studded with numerous distinctive small white flowers. The leaves are commonly not seen in floral arrangements; they are opposite, narrow, lance-shaped, and hairy. Baby's breath has a large taproot which can resprout if the plant is cut. It is a prolific seed producer, releasing 10,000 seeds or more per plant.

Baby's breath is a common filler in floral arrangements. When the arrangement has finished blooming, the cut flowers can still produce seeds. This discarded seed is a source of new infestations. Once in the landscape, it forms dense monocultures which outcompete and displace native species. The plants tend to break off at ground-level and become tumbleweeds; this serves to disperse seeds widely as well. It is tolerant of a wide range of conditions which makes it a superior competitor.



This species is difficult to control once established and you can help to prevent its spread by properly disposing of spent floral arrangements in garbage bags or burning if local ordinances allow.

- Small infestations can be controlled by cutting, digging, or spot herbicide treatment. Hand-pulling is difficult due to the tenacity of the root system.
- Larger infestations should be cut or mowed to prevent seed production. Mowing should be used in conjunction with properly-timed herbicide treatment.
- Heavy and continuous grazing can help by preventing seed production and applying pressure to mature plants. Deep tillage can be effective as well.

Sweet Pea

April Birth Flower.
Symbolizes pleasure
or good-bye.
Comes in a wide
range of soft
colors as well as
two tone colors.





REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN for the 2017 Master Gardener State Conference.
June 23rd and 24th.

Register online at <http://www.arboretum.umn.edu/EMGconference2017.aspx>



Save the date

Yearly Plant Sale

Brought to you by the River Valley

Extension Master Gardeners

Saturday, May 20, 2017

9am — 11am

Caledonia Curling Club

600 Hope St. 1 block north of Madison Avenue - behind Walgreens

Corner of Caledonia & Hope Street

We will be using the EAST entrance this year

***Purchase Plants** (CASH OR CHECK ONLY)

***Ask a Master Gardener
your gardening questions**

Proceeds given to community projects conducted by Extension Master Gardeners throughout the year.