

## HOME-GARDEN

# A horticulturist's top tools: The hand tools that take gardening tasks to the next level

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It's amazing how much easier gardening can be when you use the right tools for the job. Through a lot of trial and error and advice from other professional horticulturists, I have developed my go-to list of tools that I wouldn't dream of gardening without.

There are many tools and gadgets that do one specific function, but I focus on buying high quality tools that are versatile. One of my favorite gardening tools is a hori hori knife. This knife, also called a digging knife, has a six-inch blade, serration on one side (usually), and a wooden handle. I use mine for weeding, cutting roots, breaking up root balls, planting bulbs, dividing perennials, and countless other gardening tasks. I always choose my hori hori knife over a garden trowel, unless I need to scoop soil. If I could choose only one tool to use for the rest of my gardening days, this would be it.

Another great hand tool is a mattock tiller. It has a two-sided steel head. One side is a digging fork with straight tines and the other end is an adze, which is like a dull axe whose blade runs horizontally. It's around two pounds and has a long handle, up to two feet, that gives you good leverage and weight when you swing it. Mattock tillers can break up hard soil, cut through roots, and rough up root balls before planting trees and shrubs.

I have a lot of ornamental grasses in my yard. I leave them through the winter to provide seeds and shelter for wildlife but cutting them back in spring can be a daunting task. For years, I have used hand pruners for this job, but I recently found that using a hand scythe makes it much more efficient. The hand scythe is a mini version of the traditional tool used to harvest grain. The sharp hooked blade is about seven inches long and is great for not only cutting back ornamental grasses, but also tackling vines, harvesting vegetables, and even some pruning.

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Another very simple tool that I have come to love is a glove clip — two plastic clips, held together with a flexible band. I clip one side onto my belt loop and the other side onto my gardening gloves. This helps me keep track of my gloves when I take them off and eliminates having to put dirty or wet gloves in my pocket. Just as simple and handy, is my foam kneeling pad. Some of my friends prefer knee pads so they don't need to pick them up and move them as they work.

Of course, a bucket is another essential gardening tool, but not all buckets are created equal. I have come to love Tubtrugs brand. These lightweight, flexible, buckets have two handles that are very sturdy. They are so flexible that they can be folded in half, and you can hold both handles with one hand. I have them in various sizes and use them for weeding, mixing soil, repotting plants, and harvesting vegetables.

For pruning, Felcos #2 pruners are my go-to. Felcos has various styles of pruners, but #2 is their basic shape and has worked well for me. They sell replacement parts, so you really will only need one pair of Felcos for the rest of your life. I also like to have two sizes of hand saws. A Silky PocketBoy folding pocket saw has a 6.5" blade, a rubberized handle, and it folds in half to close. It is small enough to fit in your pocket, hence the name. I do the majority of my pruning with the Silky PocketBoy, but if I need to cut larger limbs, I use a Silky Zubat 13" hand saw. The Silky Zubat has a curved blade, and I would argue that it rivals a chainsaw with its ability to cut through larger limbs.

Using the right tools for your gardening tasks can be a game changer. And the best part is that with professional grade tools and proper care, you'll reap the benefit of your investment for years. I can attest — I've had most of my hand tools for fifteen years and counting!

*Gardening Central Mass. is written by New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill CEO Grace Elton and other Garden experts. Located on 200 acres in Boylston, New England Botanic Garden creates experiences with plants that inspire people and improve the world. Learn more at [www.nebg.org](http://www.nebg.org). The column is published on the third Sunday of the month.*