

toolin'
with
Megan



HANDY JANE TOOL TIPS

Sharpening Garden Tools

My grandfather used to say, "It's a dull knife that cuts you." I'm going to add to that, "It's a dull hoe that wears you out."

I'm not sure why brand-spanking-new hoes and shovels found for sale in hardware stores are dull. Do kitchen stores sell dull knives? Of course not. Nothing discourages a first-time gardener like a dull hoe.

You want your hoe (and shovel) to be sharp-as-a-razor! Why? For the same reason you want a sharp kitchen knife. And just like kitchen knives, not all hoes are made from metal that holds a good edge.

Ever since I was a youngster, the only kind of hoe my mother had around the farm was the 7" Amish-made hoe from Lehman's.com. It arrives already sharply honed on three sides (the wide edge is used between rows and the narrow edges are used between plants). The design of it allows you to cut exactly parallel to the ground while standing erect rather than hunched over. And it weighs less than two pounds.

Speaking of weight, my favorite shovel weighs only three pounds, as opposed to the four- to six-pounders commonly available. Pay attention to weight when shopping for a shovel. Why add three pounds of weight to every load of dirt you lift? The best shovels we have at the farm are those we've found in antique stores because the quality of the metal was better back then. We bought some expensive, hand-forged shovels that are definitely high quality, but I shy away from them because they weigh six pounds each!

At the end of your gardening season, it's wise to remove any mud and dirt from your tools and give your wooden handles a drink of boiled linseed oil (available at your local hardware store or Amazon.com).

To keep your garden tools sharp, you'll need:

- **safety glasses** (never work with metal without wearing a pair)
- **leather gloves**
- **vise**
- **file** (Nicholson Mill Hand File, American Pattern, Single Cut, Rectangular, Fine, 8", from your local hardware store or Amazon.com)
- **file handle** (Nicholson Type E File Handle, Size 0, 4¼", from your local hardware store or Amazon.com)
- **sharpening stone** (Lansky Dual-Grit Tool Sharpener, "The Puck," from your local hardware store or Amazon.com)
- **file-card cleaner**, optional (Nicholson File and Rasp Cleaner, 10", from your local hardware store or Amazon.com)

The following steps for sharpening your tools will save your back from an ache later on.

Be smart, think sharp!

To sharpen a hoe, you're going to do something called "draw filing." Draw filing means that you draw the file toward you with the handle in your left hand (this ensures that the cutting edges of the file are filing in the correct direction).

From our Farmgirl Connection chatroom (MaryJanesFarm.org/snitz):

The wire-quilt project!!! Just gotta say that when the deep freeze leaves KY and I can spread out this project on my deck ... well ... gonna do several of these nifty things and hang them in the gazebo between the posts. Yippee! And the Handy Jane column (Handy Megan) gets a standing ovation from me. The stud-finding magnet idea is such a keeper. Thanks, Megan. And thanks for another great issue—they're all keepers in this house. :)

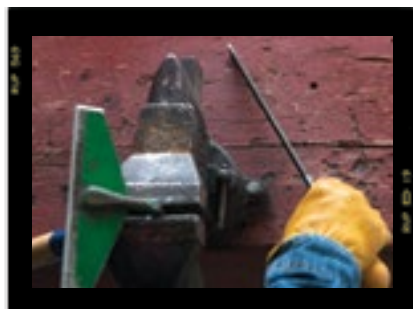
Janice (Miss Bee Haven), Kentucky
Farmgirl Sister #50

[Find both the wire-quilt project and the stud-finding tip in our "Piecemaking" Feb/Mar 2014 issue.]





Every now and then, you need to stop and knock out the metal shavings that have accumulated in the file by tapping it on something.



Or better yet, “scrub” it using a file-card cleaner.



Don't be too anxious to get the edge sharp. You want a nice, wide bevel that slowly tapers to the edge. As you continue to keep a wide bevel, you'll be sharpening the very edge eventually. The

reason you don't want to concentrate on the very edge prematurely is because then you'll have a narrow bevel, resulting in a weak edge that is more prone to chipping. After you sharpen the long edge of the hoe, concentrate on the ends, making sure to keep the corners at a crisp 90° angle, rather than ending up with rounded edges. I love keeping the ends of my hoe razor sharp so I can carefully go in between plants with just one quick stroke and cut a weed without damaging the plant I'm hoeing around.



Stop every now and then and use the fine side of your stone to remove any flimsy edges that may develop, especially along the back side of the edge you're sharpening.



Should you hit a rock while hoeing that creates a chip in the edge of your hoe, you can either live with it until you eventually file it away through sharpening or you can file the edge down to one level plane again and start over, creating a bevel and a new edge.

To sharpen a shovel, you're going to slowly work the bevel, “backing in” toward the very edge eventually. Think of it this way: You're backing into a parking spot (the edge), not driving forward into it. Because a shovel is rounded, it's difficult to use the “draw filing” method that works so well on a hoe.



Pay special attention to the angle of the bevel. Don't get in a hurry and go for the edge prematurely. Stop every now and then and use the fine side of your stone to remove any flimsy edges that may develop, especially along the back side of the edge you're sharpening, as well as adding a finishing touch to your beveled edge.



Sharpen about halfway up the shovel.

