

Over years of gardening I have made, and continue to make, many mistakes. Through no talent of my own. I have learned from some of these mistakes. I believe that is called "Amazing Grace."



Another amazing thing to happen is that I have developed a fondness for fine tools. I have always deplored machinery in general; The more doohickies they have the greater my contempt. I thoroughly enjoy cursing at and beating any machine I feel should run perfectly and at my command (I'm sure we'll soon learn that machines too have feelings and I'll be incarcerated for doohickey abuse. But until then it is my own secret crime, and a delicious one at that).

However, there are tools, beings, creations that invoke my admiration. They are usually strong, simple and, in my mind, beautiful. My favorite was a sprinkler so simple and durable, it had no moving parts. It was so good they took it off the market.

Generally, you need look no nearer or further than Smith and Hawken's tool catalog. Their prices may deter you at first but consider this: I bought their hand trowel for \$15.00. It has lasted six years with no sign of wearing out. A local trowel (hand shovel) will cost %1.50 and you will need at least three each year. That's a total of \$27.00 as compared to my \$15.00, not including the frustration factor and your loss of interest in the garden.

So a fine tool can liberate you financially and emotionally. (Remember, therapy is \$50.00 an hour.) And, as always my goal is to encourage you to find ways to simplify your garden and your life. Gardeners are a stubborn lot, and if you insist you can fumble, and sweat, and curse your way through this experience. Or you can take advantage of my hard-won genius.

First: Clothes. They should be loose; reflective colors for summer. I wear long sleeves and pants for all serious gardening. Now I didn't say they should be ugly! Just no evening gown or tux, okay? Get some cute English gardening boots. They are great for any occasion. And people will think you are cultured...crazy, but cultured. Go to a hippie store and buy cute, loose cotton clothes. Or, tie-dye your bathrobe and use it! My friend Ulla wear plastic garden clogs and she ain't no wimp. Whatever you do, protect and love your body.

Second: A good hand trowel. No excuses.

Third: A good pruner. If not "Felco," (top of the line) then a sturdy drop-forged pair with few plastic or breakable parts (Corona is good). Be sure to get the kind with a curved cutting edge, not a flat edge (called anvil). Felco pruners are in the catalog. Corona is available locally, but not frequently, so call first. If the store you called doesn't carry them, ask them why not. Customers have rights, too. Tell them it's doohickey abuse. P.S. Don't try to cut a 3" branch with a 1" pruner. Move up to lopers and then a hand saw.

Fourth: Lopers. These are basically pruners on long (2 foot) handles. Buy a good pair and be rewarded. Buy a cheap pair...often.

Hand Saw: Either a folding saw (8" folded, 14" open) or a pruning saw with a 12" to 18" blade, double teeth.

Fifth: A good shovel. I like the kind with a rounded point. Folks with argue but I'm writing this article. If you are a small person, get a shorter handle (28"). IF you are 5'6" or more, get a 48" handle. Note: A good shovel can be quite heavy. You can opt for a lighter model, but don't try to pry plants with it. You must cut all around the plant, then lift.

The above tools are those which I feel are indispensable for even the most laissez-faire gardener. You may not use all of them often but when you need them they are invaluable.

More tools:

Tree pruner: This is a hand saw on a long pole with lopers attached. It approaches doohickey status, but it is very useful.

A Bench Grinder: WHAT? Well, the only place out here in Arlington to get tools sharpened is 30 miles away. A bench grinder from Sears is \$30 and will last forever. Tool sharpening is \$2 each time. Let's see...shovel, hand trowel, pruners, lopers...that's \$8.00 times three (this year!) is \$24. Sharp tools are great. You can do what you want.

Oil: oiled tools are also great. This includes handles. Use WD-40 for moveable parts. I recycled used engine oil for my shovel, trowel and handles, as well as a mower and blades.

Gloves: As far as I am concerned, for general gardening there is only one glove. It is all cotton with classic weave, one-size-fits-all. It wears well, too. \$1.00 a par at Carter Seed Store, 85 South Front Street (every Midtown gardener knows Carter's). And you might find them at a few farm and feed store on 2-land roads in the country.

Major Investments:

A Blower: I love blowers. Don't ask me why. I feel like what's-her-name (Sigourney Weaver) in "Aliens"! Also, mine has had a very long life with no repairs.

Blower with Mulcher Attachment: Technology in progress; it's not perfect yet, but will be. It's a bit clumsy, but turns leaves into mulch for use on the spot and it's portable. Easier than a chipper and moves with you.

A Mower: (I hate lawns) But, get one that mulches or drops clippings for free fertilizer. But buy one that also has a very hard plastic bagger and you have a leaf processing machine.

Weed Whip/Edger: Again, I love the power. You can really act out some dangerous primal instincts with these machines! They're useful and versatile.

A Motorless Mower: Okay. You know I hate lawns and by now I'm sure you have followed all of my advice and built decks, ponds, woods, anything but lawn. Yet you still have a tiny little circle of lawn just for the adventure. This mower is so quiet and such good exercise. I love this machine. It is simple, strong and beautiful.

Oops! Get some hedge shears if you like formal shrubs and a watering wand (very nice). And KNEE PADS!!

Happy gardening.

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