

Shop for Gardening Tools on Sale

By Susan Camp

Novice gardeners often ask “How do I know which tools to buy?” The selection of gardening tools, gadgets, and trendy items is endless. A “Whole Gardening Tools Catalog” would require a front-end loader to lift it. Every combination of materials exists: plastic, rubber, PVC, copper, brass, aluminum, steel, and every other synthetic material or metal alloy ever discovered or invented.

Since January is the month of post-holiday sales, I decided to look online at some of the popular varieties of gardening tools. I discovered that almost every gardening columnist and blogger has researched the same topic. Maybe we all wonder if we are using the right tools, or if we use the perfect tool, we will grow the perfect garden. I also noticed that some articles actually were advertisements for specific brands of tools.

Many writers touted the costliest items in their columns and blogs. There is, after all, a certain degree of snobbery among gardeners. Secretly, we want our gardening tools to carry the best brand with an instantly recognizable name, the most comfortable handles, and the strongest blades forged by master craftsmen.

Not everyone can afford a solid brass hose nozzle or a pair of pruners that cost \$139.95, nor is it necessary to order the most expensive items in the gardening catalog or on the TV infomercial. You shouldn't buy the \$3.99 model at the discount store, either; it might last a week before disintegrating. Solidly constructed hand tools with steel blades and comfortable, ergonomically correct handles shouldn't cost the amount of your next paycheck.

Several items surfaced on every list contained in articles with titles like “38 Absolutely Necessary Gardening Tools!” and “43 Gardening Tools that Could Put Your House on the Next Garden Tour!” Don't look for these titles. I made them up, but they aren't totally unrealistic. Every article I read mentioned a good set of pruners at the top of the list, and several rated a small hand rake for gently removing leaf and other debris from under and between shrubs and perennials. You can buy an excellent pair of bypass pruners with hardened steel blades and aluminum handles for \$65 to \$85 dollars, but you might find a better price online in January.

The tool mentioned most often is the Japanese gardening knife, or Hori Hori. The Hori Hori is manufactured by several different companies and is a helpful, handy tool. The Hori Hori can serve as a trowel, trencher, bulb planter, and weeder. One side of the double blade is saw-toothed for cutting through small roots and dividing perennials like daylilies. It also works well for opening bags of mulch and compost. The regular price range for most models is \$20 to \$50.

My personal must-have tool for the past 30 years has been a Korean hand plow, or Ho-Mi. The Ho-Mi consists of a sharp, curved blade, made from a single piece of forged steel, fitted into a hardwood handle. It can be used as a digger, trencher, weeder, and chopper. The traditional Ho-Mi is right-handed, but left-handed and ambidextrous models are available, as are mini and long handled models. The traditional Ho-Mi costs \$25 to \$35. I keep several in various locations so I always have one handy. The point is very sharp when new and can be sharpened when it dulls, so safety is an issue with this tool. I came close to amputating a toe several summers ago. Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) Publication BSE-98P covers basic hand tool safety and maintenance.

Whether your favorite tool is a good pair of pruners, a hand trowel, or something a little more exotic, January is a good time to check the gardening sales catalogs for new or replacement tools. And while you are getting your old and newly purchased hand tools ready for springtime, spray paint the handles bright red so you can find them the next time you lose them in the garden.

Happy Gardening in 2025!