

## Pruning Tips – Tool Care

By Dan Chrisinger

### Sharpening and Cleaning Tools

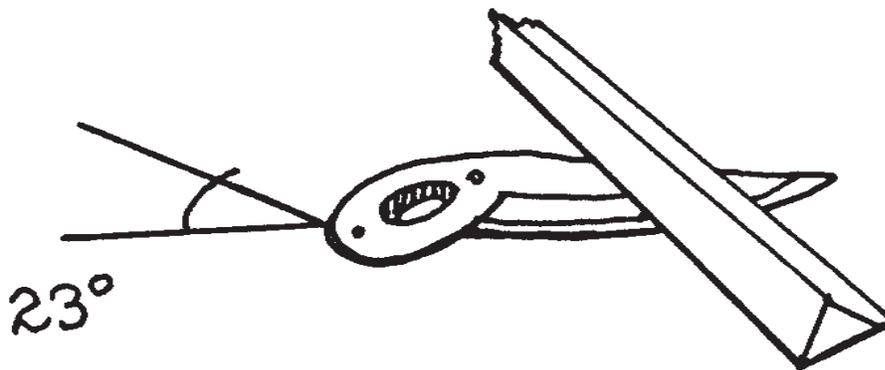
Many of my tools have wooden handles. Wood was once alive and a little oil and minimal care will help it not dry out, check, crack, or split. Wrap a half sheet of double ought (00) or triple ought (000) sandpaper around the handle, apply light pressure and slide the sandpaper from end to end of the wooden handle. Pay special attention to any rough areas and sand the entire handle smooth.

Then apply linseed oil to a soft cloth and slide it along the handle, end to end. The wood handle is now clean, smooth, and refreshed. Reapply oil anytime you see the wood drying out. If you want your wooden handles to shine like they did when you purchased them, mix linseed oil with shellac in a 1 to 1 ratio. This mix is sometimes referred to as log or tung oil.

Now that your handle looks new, inspect the non-moving parts. If there is a little rust, you can remove it by rubbing it with sandpaper or steel wool. If there is a lot of rust, I would suggest using a wire brush and rust remover. When all the rust is gone, use the linseed oil soaked cloth to coat the surfaces. This will help prevent the return of the rust.

I know a few gardeners who keep a five-gallon pail of sand mixed with oil near their tool rack. Before they store their shovels, spades, and forks they plunge the blades a few times into the oily sand. The blade is then clean and re-oiled. Caution; do not use USED motor oil. Oil used in internal combustion engines contains corrosive chemicals which will damage your tools.

If your tools have moving parts be careful to not get any dirt or abrasive from the steel wool or sandpaper in, around, or between these parts. Abrasives between these parts will cause excessive wear and shorten the life of



*Correct angle for Felco #8*

the tool. (If you suspect that dirt is in the moving parts, disassemble the tool, clean all the parts, reassemble and apply a light machine oil).

Now it is time to sharpen your tools. If you do not feel comfortable sharpening your tools, start with your shovels and spades. They will be the most forgiving. You can purchase a ten-inch mill file at any hardware store. I suggest getting one with a handle and both a fine and a coarse side. Secure the tool in a vice so that it does not move. The sharpening stroke will be made at a forty five-degree angle from the back edge of the tool toward the front. I will refer to the front of the shovel or spade as being the surface facing away from you. The front of the hoe is the side facing the handle.

Wearing gloves may be helpful if you have a lot of filing to do. Grasp the file handle with your dominant hand and place the palm of your hand on the back of the file. Be sure to keep your fingers clear of the sharpened surface as you make your sharpening stroke. The file should move along the edge as well as toward the front of the blade. If you make the edge too fine, it will roll and become blunt too easily. You can use the coarse side of the file for shovels, spades, and hoes and the fine side for

hedge trimmers, shears, and mower blades. You may want to use a smaller file for sharpening your fine hedge trimmers and shears.

For tools such as secateurs, and small shears I use a file that has a diamond embedded surface manufactured by DMT (Diamond Machine Technology of Marlborough, MA). These files are available at Hardwick's Hardware in Seattle. They are also available through catalogues or on line from Gempler's and A. M. Leonard (1-800-433-0633). Before you begin to sharpen the blade, examine the angle at which the blade was originally sharpened. Do your best to maintain that angle, smoothly pushing the file or sharpening stone toward the front of the blade at the same time you are pushing along the blade.

Sharp tools make clean cuts and clean tools look sharp.