

Tool time: New gadgets give gardeners help around the yard

BY CHANDRA ORR
Copley News Service

Great gardens take more than just a green thumb. The proper tools can make turning the topsoil, picking the produce or just tidying the yard more comfortable, more convenient — or even just a little more fun.

Of the thousands of garden products on the shelves, the following gadgets and gear are some of the best, from the new and ingenious to the tried and true.

■ **UnionTools Wet N Dry Rake (\$18)**

Homeowners inundated with gardening tools can clear the clutter by choosing tools that pull double-duty, like the innovative Wet N Dry Rake. Tackling leaves and debris in any weather condition, this handy all-season rake not only saves space it also helps homeowners get their work done faster.

Lawn enthusiasts can adjust the rake to any debris type simply by adjusting the tension bar on the oversized cupped head. Loose, springy tension quickly tackles dry leaves, grass clippings and hedge trimmings, while stiffer tension tames unruly wet leaves.

With a 26-inch width, the rake covers ample ground in less time than many traditional rakes. An extra-long 44-inch handle helps homeowners get at hard-to-reach spots, while foam-cushion gripping helps ward off hand fatigue.

■ **Hoover Spin Sweep Outdoor Sweeper (\$79)**

What a rake doesn't take care of, the Hoover Spin Sweep certainly will. This compact contraption looks like a vacuum, but uses no plugs, batteries or motors, which means it can go places ordinary vacuums can't — including the garage, driveway, patio, walkways and pool area.

Two powerful brushes collect dirt, grass clippings, leaves and litter, and deposit the debris in a large bin. With multiple height settings, the Spin Sweep is so lightweight and easy to use, even the kids can help with yard work.

■ **Bionic Gardening Glove (\$40)**

The time-honored art of gardening meets the Space Age with the Bionic Gardening Glove. Developed by a top orthopedic hand surgeon, the gloves boast seven patents and design features generally reserved for extreme sport-

ing gear.

The ultra-soft leather gloves are known for reducing hand fatigue, blisters and calluses that can accompany long hours in the garden. Anatomic relief pads in the fingers, flexible motion zones in the knuckles, breathable webbing between the fingers and form-fitting neoprene wrist supports all aid in reducing stress to the hand and wrist.

Available in multiple sizes, Bionic Gardening Gloves are washable and stay soft even when wet. For more information, visit www.bionicrockergloves.com, or call (877) 524-6642.

■ **Brookstone Indoor Plant Kit (\$50)**

It's called the Indoor Plant Kit, but this tote and tool set works equally well for outdoor foliage that craves a fine touch. The six-piece set includes pruners, snippers, an aerator, a trowel, a spade and a foliage mister, all packed in a sturdy leather tote.

With seven exterior pockets, the tote has a space for each tool with room left over for a portable phone. An oversized interior pocket holds additional gardening gear. Each tool is made of drop-forged steel with hardwood handles.

■ **Plow & Hearth Garden Rocker (\$30)**

For those long afternoons spent fussing over the flower bed, gardeners will want the Garden Rocker, a comfy recliner that minimizes physical aches and strains. Made of molded plastic, the Garden Rocker features an oversized, contoured seat mounted on a rounded base that rocks in every direction, allowing for a range of movement.

With adjustable heights, this clever seat keeps gardeners close to the task at hand — whether it be planting, weeding or harvesting low-lying produce. The Garden Rocker is available with an optional padded seat and nylon side pockets to stow gardening gear.

■ **Smith & Hawken Flower and Plant Markers (\$11)**

Green thumb getting out of hand? Gardeners can keep track of overflowing foliage with these long-lasting plant markers. Made of galvanized wire, these markers are cute and inconspicuous. They are impervious to rust and corrosion, so they will last season to season. Over time, ultraviolet light will darken the sleek silver stakes, revealing a softer, antiqued finish. The kit includes one black

carbon pencil and 25 markers, each 10-inches high. At close to 3-inches wide, the nameplates offer plenty of room for recording species information, date planted and other pertinent information.

■ **UnionTools Fruit Picker (\$8)**

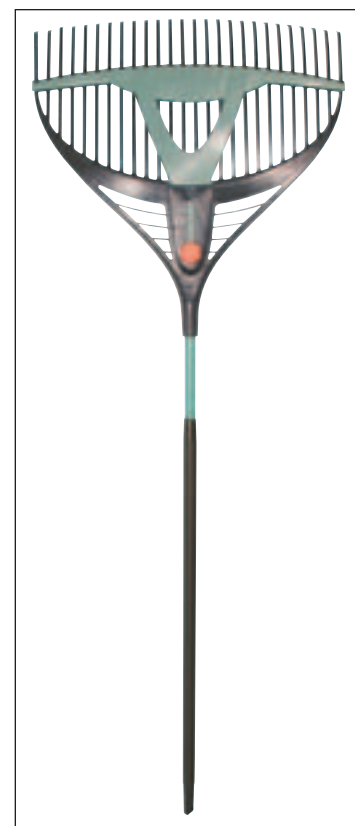
Fruit picking gadgets have been around for years, but many gardeners may have missed this tried-and-true tool. With this simple, yet ingenious device, gardeners can get a grip on hard-to-reach fruit. From apples and oranges to peaches and plums, this cool contraption helps pick produce up to seven feet away.

Purchased alone or with the accompanying 85-inch wooden staff, this small vinyl-coated, metal cage gently coaxes fruit from the branch with numerous well-spaced tines. The fruit then falls into the padded basket, ensuring minimal bruising.

■ **Suncast Storage Seat (\$30)**

With all this great gear, gardeners need great storage. The Suncast Storage Seat not only holds a lot, but it looks great on patios and porches or nestled among the leaves of a lush garden.

This portable, plastic box has the look of light hard-



CNS Photo/UnionTools
The Wet N Dry Rake can tackle leaves and debris in any weather condition.

wood with the durability of a synthetic. The lift-up lid doubles as a seat or potting bench, offering a place to lounge along a garden path or space to display potted plants. The Storage Seat stands 24-inches tall and offers enough room to store a variety of small gardening tools, fertilizers, pots and other supplies.

Tools of the trade: The right equipment keeps your yard looking great

BY EILENE ZIMMERMAN
Copley News Service

When you're ready to tackle the lawn and garden, you'll need more than just gloves and a sun hat. Using the right tools can make gardening less of a chore and with care, high-quality tools can last for years.

A mower is essential for lawns — and they have come a long way from the belching, gas-powered model your dad trotted out each Sunday. Lawn mowers can be push-style rotary, gas, battery or electric. Lou Manfredini, ACE's Helpful Hardware Man and host of the radio show "Lou Manfredini's Home Improvement Minutes," says if you have a small lawn — a quarter acre or less — you can get a healthy workout from a rotary lawn mower.

If you want an electric mower, Manfredini suggests cordless mower model like the one Black & Decker makes. Gas mowers, also a good choice, are more efficient and cleaner than they once were.

Sharpen the blade at least once a year; if it's not sharp, it won't be efficient," says

Manfredini. Clean out the rotors and beneath the blades to remove caked grass and use a little light-weight oil on all moving parts. When you store it for the winter, oil the moving parts well, wipe the body clean and keep it in a dry place like a garage or shed. If it has to be outside, cover it loosely with a waterproof tarp.

Make sure you've also got a spade shovel, a rake and a set of smaller, hand-held tools such as a trowel and hoe. Buy a metal rake, which is longer lasting than plastic. If the tines on the end become misshapen from use, they can be straightened with pliers. Choose tools with a fiberglass or composite handle. Wood handles aren't as durable and without proper care become brittle and break. Manfredini suggests using a rag soaked in mineral oil to wipe down wood handles.

Mineral or vegetable oil can also be used for the blades of spades, hoes, shovels and trowels to protect them from rust — but don't use motor oil, advises the experts at Smith &

Hawken, because it harms microorganisms in the soil. Remove rust as soon as it appears using a wire brush or pliable sanding block and sharpen blades with a file or sharpening stone.

You'll need a pair of hedge shears and pruning shears, which are smaller and resemble scissors. Higher-quality hedge shears have bumpers or metal shock springs to take some of the shock out of the cutting action and a high-carbon steel blade that will hold its edge a long time. Sharpen blades periodically and keep the joints where the blades come together oiled.

Finally, you'll need a hose and spray attachment. Most

people walk into a store and buy a cheap, nylon mesh hose, says Manfredini, and those kink and break constantly. Instead splurge on a much more durable polyblend hose — a combination of nylon and rubber. Always roll up the hose, ideally on a wheel. Never wrap it too tightly because it won't perform well; instead keep the loops about the size of a hula-hoop.

For about \$15 you can buy a good-quality multiple-setting spray attachment giving you the right water pressure for washing the car or watering tomato plants. If you want a watering can, get one that is a lightweight plastic, because each gallon of water in it weighs eight

pounds. If you must have metal, Smith & Hawken advises choosing one that's been hot-dipped in molten zinc. Avoiding the kind that have been cut out and pieced together from pre-galvanized metal. When you finish with it, turn the can upside down so it can drain and dry completely.

When choosing tools, one rule of thumb is that heavy is good.

"In almost every instance, the heavier tool is the better," says Manfredini. Choose those with a lifetime warranty.

"Manufacturers give you a lifetime warranty because they are betting on the fact their product won't fail."

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