

Notes of BOGs meeting - 16/11/11

Roger did a presentation on **Garden Tools** based on articles by Alan Titchmarsh and Peter Seabrook, which highlighted quite different views on what was needed in terms of tools.

Peter Seabrook felt that lack of sophisticated tools is no obstacle when it comes to veg gardening – he felt that your basic requirements could be met just with a spade, a piece of wood and a length of string. If you learn to handle a spade adeptly, it will do very nearly every job that needs doing during vegetable growing.

Having said this he isn't against owning a range of tools to make the job easier. His only stipulation is that you must always buy good tools – cheap tools are invariably a bad buy.

Whereas Alan Titchmarsh takes a very different approach, his garden shed is groaning with gardening gear. However he does say that he can count the ones he uses on the fingers of two hands. He also suggests that you can buy just the essentials you need from the economy ranges of any the well-known garden tool manufacturers. There's no need to spend a fortune.

So what do they see as the tools you really need? Both agree on basically the same list.

Spade and Fork – these are the basic digging implements. A spade is better on sandy or loamy soils and a fork on heavier clay soils. But a stainless steel spade will do the job on heavy soil, but do buy an expensive model as the cheaper stainless ones have a tendency to crack. You will have to decide which you prefer the T-handle or the D-handle; taller people might find the long-handled digging shovel a better option. Phil has long-handled ergonomically designed spade made by Wilkinson Sword which he finds kind on the back.

Another point to watch out for when buying a spade is on the tread (the spot where you push the spade into the ground with your foot). Many have a straight edge at the tread while others have a small flat piece of metal, which is kinder on your footwear.

Hoes – these break down into two types the Draw Hoe or Dutch Hoe (push hoe). Draw hoes have their head at right angles to the handle and are mainly useful in earthing up potatoes and drawing out a drill for planting seeds.

Dutch hoes or chop hoes are good for controlling small annual weeds, you just glide the blade forward just below the surface of the soil. Titchmarsh describes it as cutting weeds off at their stocking tops!! It is essential that the blades on hoes are kept sharp (something I never do!).

Rake – should be thought of as a levelling tool, not as a way of turning soil into dust, which just turns to hardpan when it rains. When used properly they are good for gathering up larger stones, bits of root and other garden debris.

Trowel – very useful for planting vegetable and small bedding plants, perennials, weeding and for tidying up pots on the patio. It's well worth spending quite a bit of money on a trowel, my experience is that cheap ones always seem to break at the point they meet the handle.

Wheelbarrow – get a decent builder's barrow if you've got a lot of shifting of soil and rocks around (and manure). Otherwise use a plastic Trug, which are a lot easier to use and you're less likely to overfill them.

Secateurs – we all agreed that it's worth buying a good pair of these, the cheaper ones have a tendency of twisting at their axis and go blunt very quickly. You'll need to decide what type you need in your garden – the parrot-beak type that have blades that bypass each other like scissors or the anvil type that has one sharp blade that cuts down onto a flattened base. Titchmarsh suggests getting red handled ones, as they are more difficult to lose (hmm?).

Watering can – we might question the need for this up here in our slightly damp atmosphere, but they are very useful for liquid feeding plants. I also find them useful when I'm planting seeds, for this try to use one with a long spout as this means that the spout is at a lower angle to the ground when you are watering, which causes less damage to the soil.

Several thought that the one other tool we couldn't do without is a good sharp **garden knife**, essential for so many jobs around the garden and whilst harvesting the crops.

The **dibber** is also extremely useful for transplanting and is a good way of using up your old broken spade or fork handle.

Whilst not all of us do this it's good practice at this time of year to clean, sharpen and oil all your garden tools.

Topical tip – It's that time of year for strong winds so stake those brassicas if you haven't done so yet, and tie down any cloches you have protecting the crops.

There's still time to take cuttings from your fruit bushes to get more fruit bushes that will be ready for planting in about two years time.

Clear away any mulch from the base of bushes to let the birds get to any larvae or eggs that have been laid there.