



Most of us dirt diggers love our garden tools – we love the prospect of looking at new ones, we relish finding old, well used tools at auctions and yard sales. We will even go through a withdrawal in the middle of winter as we impatiently wait to use our tools again for the first time. And some of the most important purchases made for the garden are those tools. There are many ways to go about purchasing any tool - the first inclination may be to purchase any old thing, on sale or not, or whatever the neighbor, Uncle Fred or Aunt Frederica uses. While tools purchased under those conditions may turn out to be perfect – perhaps using a different technique for purchasing may work to your advantage. Namely, know the tools you need, know the tools you want, and definitely know the difference between the two.

In order to figure out which tools you need, a basic understanding of the work level required by your landscape is a good idea. Identify and list the tasks for which you have primary responsibility. Next to each task, list out the tools required to get the job done in a safe and efficient manner. Example: lawn care – mower, trimmer, edger, rake, and a drop seeder/feeder (as well as any and all of the shop tools required for home maintenance) to name a few items. List out all tools for each and every task – pretty substantial lists, aren't they? Kind of makes you tired just reading it. (The up side is that you now have a detailed listing of all of the tasks, and needed tools, which can be given to the kids – your own or the neighbor's - to do. Remember to always be safe!) Creating these lists offers a great opportunity to cross reference and consolidate needs, cutting back on the amount of tools you need to purchase or have hanging around in the garage. It also offers a chance for you to evaluate and/or justify purchasing some outside services.

So, you've made your lists and now know you need a pruner or a mower or even my favorite - a garden hoe. How do you choose which one is best for you? Only through evaluation and testing can you learn the characteristics of each model and learn which to buy to satisfy your need for best affordable quality. Don't buy cheap quality tools, especially those that are expected to live and work hard with you in the garden for many years. Buy quality and you will have to replace the entire tool less often, if at all. Frequent and heavy use requires tools that are strong, yet lightweight and designed with longevity and ergonomics in mind. Terrific metal alloys are available and used to make blades lightweight, strong and durable enough to hold an edge through a decent amount of usage. Studies in ergonomics have resulted in handle designs and overall tool structures that cause less fatigue during periods of intense use. These new developments, in materials and design, make it almost enjoyable for those with arthritis and other physical challenges to once again use garden tools.

If you are unsure of which model best fits your requirements for weight, design and handling, purchasing without being able to try the tools can lead to a sad case of the post-purchase tool blues. The only way you can really decide if a tool is right for you is to hold it, and at the very least, simulate use – repetitively. Each hand is different and each individual's motion of use will vary and respond differently to the shape of the tools as they are held. Simulating use will allow you to twist, turn and manipulate all of the potential tool choices to get a good sense of appropriate tool to hand fit.

When it comes to the actual act of purchasing – that transaction can happen in so many ways, both in person and via those methods that do not require you to be present – on line and catalog to name two. If you know the characteristics of the tool you are looking to purchase, on line and catalog sales can be great ways to shop for the best deal. Reputable companies and quality garden centers have years of experience using tools of all types and are a fantastic resource for any questions as you try those fantastic garden tools. Get your list of needed tools together and let the shopping games begin. What fun!