



Sanitation & Gardening



You probably have never thought about sanitation and gardening but they should be going hand in hand. Even if you have a greenhouse or don't, keeping your tools clean is very important. Now is the time to take advantage of sanitizing if you have not already done so.

Pathogens, insects, weed seeds, plant viruses can hide on your tools and you would not know it. So, regular and routine cleaning and sanitation should be used to keep your tools free of these pests. For example: tomatoes are highly susceptible to some diseases like spotted wilt virus. It is very important when you are pruning one plant you must sanitize your clippers before you go to the next plant. If you don't sanitize your clippers, you could be passing the virus on to a healthy plant. Easiest way to do this is carry a small bottle of alcohol with you when you go to the garden and a small towel or even alcohol wipes.

When purchasing seeds, purchase from a reputable supplier. While unlikely, some viruses can be transmitted by seed, so make sure you are buying high-quality seed that is disease free.

Another source of contamination is people, whether for disease, insects or food-borne illnesses. Clean clothing; shoes and hands go a long way. Plastic gloves are a necessity as they help protect you from passing on pathogens, etc. to the plants.

Now is the time to give your gardening tools a good scrub-down. You will need rubber gloves, a putty knife, steel wool, plastic bucket, dish soap, bleach, vegetable oil, lighter fluid, play sand, bleach-free disinfecting wipes, old towels, and garden hose with nozzle.

1. Remove soil and grime with "jet" setting on nozzle, then use putty knife for any caked on soil.
2. For rust, use the steel wool and scrub until rust disappears.
3. For sap, put a little bit of lighter fluid on a cloth and wipe tools to remove sap.
4. Now that the soil, rust and sap have been removed, it is time to soak your tools in a bucket of hot water. Add 1 Tablespoon of dish soap for extra cleaning boost.
5. Rinse with clean water then dry tools with an old towel. Putting the tools away wet could cause them to rust again.

6. To keep your tools in good shape, a "quick clean" bucket is handy to have around. Fill a plastic bucket with sand and one cup of vegetable oil. Now you can dip your larger towels (shovels) into the bucket, remove any soils, grime, etc. while protecting the finish.
7. Any time you have plants with fungal or bacterial problems, you should always disinfect your garden tools after using them. Keep bleach-free disinfectant wipes handy to remove sap, bacteria or fungus from shears, so you don't spread anything from plant to plant through you garden tools.

If you have a greenhouse or a cold frame and you use these for starting seeds, cuttings and growing young plants until they are ready to put in the ground, sanitation is a must. You must always start out with clean sterile plant material. If you bring in seedlings from another source it is best to "quarantine" them until you are sure the plants are free of pests and disease. If you reuse plant material, it should be sterile. This can be done by filling a gallon zip type bag and heating in the microwave for 10 minutes. Be careful, the soil will be extremely hot and if you open the bag it will let out steam and can burn you. Let the bag cool before opening. You now have sterile soil.

Now, for the greenhouse itself, keeping surfaces and equipment clean is an important part of any sanitation program. With the greenhouse being a high humid environment, surfaces in the growing area, such as walls, benches and floors are the perfect places for pests and diseases along with algae to breed and grow. If you don't maintain a sanitized facility, these pathogens will pass on to your plants and then you have to work on fighting what ever is wrong with your plants, be it a disease or insect. Algae can grow in the floor surface making it unsafe to walk on.

There are many products on the market to use to sanitize your tools. I have found for me, alcohol is quick and easy for my clippers and other tools I use for propagation or as stated above the bleach-free disinfectant wipes. When you are planting seeds, up-potting seedlings or propagating cuttings, your pots should be sanitized also as germs and eggs can linger in the soil that was left in the pots from the previous plantings. Using a mixture of 10 parts water to one part bleach or a good household cleaner such as liquid Mr. Clean or Lysol are fine. If you do not disinfect the pots also, you could be passing on something "deadly" to your next crop of plants. And all your time has been wasted for not.

Sanitation can go a long way in keeping your garden, tools and greenhouse free of unwanted pests when you are starting up each season.

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