



Urban Harvest

Growing gardens. Enriching lives.

## Unusual but Useful Gardening Tools

Dr. Bob Randall

This appears to be awards season on the TV, so I thought I would give out some of my awards for garden tools:

### Digging and Weeding

The best spades have forged blades and come from one tempered steel block. They have a solid back rather than indented at the top center, so soil and clay do not lodge and add weight to the spade. For shallow rooted small weeds (like chickweed and purslane), the best weeding-tool by far is the Circle Hoe (available online.) They come in both short-handled and long-handled varieties and make the task of shallow cultivation quick, effective, and good exercise without killing too many wanted plants. For tough or deep-rooted weeds the best short-handled weeding tool by far is the offset digging knife, available online at Gempler's. The best trowels are Wilkinson Sword stainless and the Union Razorback. I have found them locally at Southwest Fertilizer.

### Mulching and Pruning

A wide heavy mulching fork is useful to move mulch. One of my favorites is available online at A.M. Leonard.

For pruning fruit, use Felco pruning shears, loppers and saws. These can be found at Southwest Fertilizer and Berings locally as well as at Peaceful Valley Farm Supply and A.M. Leonard online.

You will also need two squeeze bottles such as the ones used to sell dish soap to hold dilute bleach and water to sterilize pruning blades. You need light weight machine oil for the shears. A fishing-tackle box is good for toting small tools around the garden.

### Plant Supports, Wheelbarrows, Hoses, Sheds and Earmuffs

To silence power tools, get sound deadening earmuffs, available at local hardware stores.

To keep plants off the ground, use metal Tee stakes, galvanized metal pipe, rails, conduit, or rebar, metal cages, metal trellises, and metal wire. Cut the wire using pliers with wire cutters or the wire hook on Felco. Pound metal stakes or pipe, with a short handled sledge or maul. Aluminum wire (sold as electric fencing at Home Depot) works well to hold up plants that must be frequently retied over the years.

To carry hay and other things, a construction grade metal wheelbarrow is best. Cheaper models will die quickly.

The best watering hoses are 100% rubber – I've found them at Sears and Southwest Fertilizer as well

as at Peaceful Valley Farm Supply online. They will outlast nylon by years, not crimp, be less aggravation, and therefore justify their 40% higher cost. Fan nozzles are best for watering. A moisture probe that you can stick in the ground or in a pot to gauge soil moisture can be useful.

A garden shed is nice. Wooden ones on concrete blocks are the most durable, but beware of arsenic treated wood.

### **Frost Protection Devices**

Most winters, you will do fine if your plants are hardy to 23° F, and you can get nearly anything through lower temperatures if you cover them well with boxes, pails, dirt, hay or blankets or some combination of these. In 1983, I got two satsuma orange trees through the worst cold spell in history by keeping a five gallon bucket of warm water next to the trunk and wrapping a sleeping bag around trunk and bucket. In 1989, I got a small dwarf orange under an overhang through 12 hours below 15°. I put a Wall O' Water (a ring of water tubes) around the trunk, a trashcan over the tree, and a cloth over the can. Only the top twig was damaged. Wall O' Water can be found at several online retailers.

Wall O' Water works well on any small plant, protecting to 10°, but they are also unstable, not very durable, and unsuitable for tall plants. Much better is a more expensive hard plastic device: the Aqua Dome. The Aqua Dome is a one-piece, double-walled, very durable cylinder. It works quite well on all sorts of spring vegetables. It can be purchased online at Winged Weeder.

Although these seem costly, I have found them well worth the money. If you get rapid growth from tomatoes and once they are high other later spring vegetables because of nighttime warmth in February March and April, you can easily get an extra 10-20 pounds of vegetables. Since this device allows frost protected planting and night warmth provision in the spring for all sorts of vegetables, it probably pays for itself in extra vegetables within a year or two. If Aqua Domes are not left out in the sun once they no longer are in use, they probably have a life span of a decade or more. I left an Aqua Dome out one summer, and found the plastic became too brittle. Aqua Domes kept inside are now five years old without sign of wear.

Tomato cages, gallon milk bottles full of water, pails, or drums, and a tarp will handle bigger trees. Banking a foot or so of vegetable garden soil around a trunk will at least save the portion above the graft. You can make an excellent citrus tree protector out of 5' remesh fence (Home Depot, Montalbano) possibly wired double height 9 ft, lined with cardboard and covered with tarp or plastic. 25 or more gallons of water or a light bulb inside this will protect against any damage.