

As many of you who read this column know, I frequently surf the Net to learn more about gardening. This week though I learned a humorous (or was it shocking) lesson. I used my favorite search engine “Google” and keyed in the tool name *French hoe*. Well! Was I ever surprised by the results! I still don’t know what the dang thing is. None of my gardener buddies has been able to describe it to me either. So, dear readers, send me an email or write to me and tell me what your favorite gardening tool is and if you know what a gardening *French hoe* is please enlighten me.

The Internet search reminded me to share two of my favorite gardening sites with you. But first let’s talk about gardening tools. This is the time of year when many nurseries and home improvement stores put tools on sale. Here are some great gardening tools you might want to pick up if you don’t have them already.

Verna Sorenson, fourth grade teacher at Poulsbo Elementary School, introduced me to a spading fork last year. Spading forks are shaped like a pitchfork but the tines are blunt and wide, plus the handle is shorter. The one I purchased from Sears has a fiberglass handle. Spading forks are good for dividing perennials and moving plants. It’s an amazing tool used like a pointed spade, only much better. This tool is especially adept at helping loosen and dig up those clumps of pesky grass in your borders and beds. The least expensive one I’ve found was sixteen dollars and the most expensive was forty dollars.

Do you have cracks in your sidewalks, steps or driveways where weeds congregate? Have you ever seen those hoes that are shaped like a triangle? Unfortunately I don’t know their proper name. But I do know how well they work. Scrape the pointed end along the cracks in your cement areas and the weeds pop right out. This tool is also perfect for making rows in your vegetable garden and in loosening and lifting weeds from spaces between the rows.

Here’s another tool I don’t know the name of. It’s the half circle tool on a long handle. Actually, I’m pretty sure it’s called a half-moon edger. This tool not only edges, it’s absolutely perfect for chopping up vegetation before you deposit it in your compost pile. Speaking of compost, an invaluable tool for this process is a manure fork. The fork part of the tool is much wider and bigger than a regular pitchfork. This tool is perfect for stirring compost, pitching debris and manure and scooping up and spreading bark. I’m sure you could find many other functions for your manure fork.

For pruning you’ll want to own hand-held pruners, long-handled loppers and pruners, and a folding hand saw. When purchasing pruners be sure to get a scissor-action type. That means “bypass” not “anvil” type pruners. Anvil pruners have a blade that pushes against a flat surface. This crushes and breaks plant tissue. Bypass pruners use a scissor action that makes a clean cut that won’t harm plant tissue.

These are a few of the tools you’ll want to look for to assist in your gardening chores or pleasures. Don’t forget to check out thrift stores and garage sales in your quest. Also ask your favorite nursery person or DIY clerk when the tools in their store are going on sale.

Two web sites you’ll want to visit often are gardenguides.com and plantcare.com. Gardenguides.com has weekly gardening advice and information. You can also access the archives to look up articles on a plethora of topics, including recipes. Three of the topics you can search in detail are flowers, vegetables and herbs. You can also subscribe to a free newsletter that will be delivered to your e-mailbox each week. I’ve been visiting this site for over two years. The only caution is that some of the advice isn’t pertinent to our growing climate (i.e. the advice pertains to the east coast). Plantcare.com is a new site (about six months old). You can visit this site to find color photos of thousands of houseplants and then read about the horticultural requirements of that particular plant. Have you ever bought one or more of those polka dot plants (*Hypoestes*) and wondered why the dang things always died? I had researched these plants in many books and hadn’t discovered the secret to keeping them healthy and happy. Plantcare.com gave me the answer – don’t fertilize them ever. Try visiting plantcare.com or gardenguides.com, you’ll be pleased. You can access these sites for free at the library if you don’t have a computer.

You can email comments to Peg Tillery at gardenmentor@yahoo.com or in care of this newspaper.