

Q What is the best way to clean garden tools for winter storage?

A Ideally, we gardeners have been cleaning and sharpening our garden tools all throughout the season and can simply rinse off the last of the dirt and be set for next spring. While not many of us have time for that in between weeding, watering and harvesting, hopefully the garden tools can be restored with a few simple steps:

- *Hose or scrub off any remaining dirt or debris and allow tools to dry.*
- *Clean pruners, saws, shears and hand tools with isopropyl alcohol to sanitize and remove any plant sap. Bleach is not recommended as it can pit the metal on tools, inviting in bacteria.*
- *Use steel wool, sandpaper or a wire brush to remove any rust. If rust is extremely bad, the tool may need a soak in white vinegar for several hours.*
- *Once rust is removed, sharpen tools with a file or sharpening stone.*
- *If necessary, sand smooth any rough wooden handles and coat with linseed oil.*
- *Lastly, wipe down the metal with a coat of oil or spray with a water displacing product to prevent future rust problems.*

Q As a new gardener, I love looking at all the offerings in the seed catalogs, but it's a bit overwhelming. Can you help guide me through the terminology?

A Full of possibilities and the anticipation of warmer weather, browsing through seed catalogs is a great way for a gardener to spend a cold winter evening. It's important to know how to decipher the garden jargon and disease codes within seed catalogs so you can get the best product for your needs. The following are some of the common terms you will see:

Naturalizes or Vigorous - usually the plant will run wild, be prepared to continually manage the spread.

Tall - the plant will probably need a stake or support to keep it upright, especially in windy areas.

Treated seed - often painted a bright color for distinction, these seeds have been treated with a fungicide or insecticide to protect them from insects and pathogens once in the soil.

Heavy feeder - the plant requires more nutrients than most, be ready to fertilize!

Fruit persists - for fruiting plants, the fruit stays on the plant throughout most of the season. This is important for reducing the maintenance of fruit litter in the garden.

Determinate and indeterminate - typically concerning tomatoes, determinant plants will grow to a certain size and stop with all the fruit ripening at once. Indeterminate plants grow indefinitely and can get quite large, often requiring staking. They will produce fruit until killed by a hard frost.

Hybrid (F, F1, F2) - hybrid seeds are a cross between two or more varieties. Saving hybrid seeds is not recommended as they will not produce plants true to type.

Open-pollinated (OP) - these are pollinated by natural means as opposed to being cloned, and will produce true-to-type plants from seeds saved year to year (often relating to heirloom varieties).

Days to harvest or Days to maturity - refers to the number of days after planting that one can expect the first harvest.

TMV, TSWV - these are disease codes for Tobacco Mosaic Virus and Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus respectively, and when listed, the seed/plant is resistant to the disease.

V, F, N, A, LB - disease code for Verticillium Wilt, Fusarium Wilt, nematodes, Anthracnose and Late Blight. Seeds with any of these designations will be resistant to the disease.



Do you have Master Gardener questions? Send them to: extensionmagazine@montana.edu
