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While the Weather is Still Nice, It is Time to Winterize Garden Tools

Winter garden prep can sneak up on us, so it is important to know what to do to keep garden tools in working condition. Certain tools can be damaged when the temperatures drop, especially tools that hold water. Garden hoses and irrigation systems with water still inside run the risk of bursting during hard freezes. Hoses should be drained and moved indoors during the winter for storage. Stretching them out and coiling them around your arm will cause the water to drain naturally. Ultraviolet light from the sun causes brittleness and decay over time, so hoses should be stored in a shed or garage to prolong their life.

Irrigation lines are trickier to winterize, especially if you have a sprinkler system with underground lines. These lines are not buried very deep, but on the plus side are typically self-draining. That doesn't mean that there's nothing you need to do – the main valve should be closed, and the irrigation lines should be blown dry with an air compressor. If your irrigation system has manual drains, these should be opened. Mapping out where they are will make it easier to close them in the spring before the system is once again pressurized. Most lawn services will be able to help with draining and blowing out irrigation systems.

Cleaning off garden tools is also important for their long-term function. Leaving dirt and debris on garden tools will lead to the formation of rust. To get dirt and debris off, use a steel brush to rub down all surfaces of the tool. Wipe down all surfaces with a damp paper towel and then use a paper towel with oil to wipe down all metal surfaces. Typically, linseed oil will be the easiest to find at hardware stores. This oil will act as a barrier and repel any moisture that might try to adhere to the surface of the tool. By keeping moisture off of your tools, rust formation is prevented. If wooden handles are starting to form splinters, smooth them out with low-grit sandpaper. Any sandpaper will do the job, but the rougher the sandpaper, the faster the handle will become smooth.

Lawnmowers will also need servicing before being stored for the winter. Untreated gasoline left in the tank can become thick and gummy in the cold months, so it's important to run the tank dry or add a stabilizer to the tank to prevent clogging. Battery terminals can also corrode during the drier months, so cleaning the terminals with a wire brush will make starting up your mower

much easier next year. This is also a good time to sharpen any mower blades that might have dulled. There are a few steps to this process:

- Remove grass and debris from the blades with a damp cloth, drying the blades before sharpening.
- Use a grinding wheel or hand file to remove nicks from the cutting edge.
- File the edges to 1/32 inch, keeping the angle consistent. Avoid overheating the blade, which could warp its shape.
- As with other garden tools, clean the blades with a thin coating of oil to prevent rust buildup.

Winter is very hard on tools, but with these tips, you can protect your investment from damage and use them to keep your lawns and gardens looking nice.

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Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

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