

GARDENING

Pass me my weapon of choice

Garden Girl, Caroline Broome gives tips and advice on gardening tools and accessories

CAROLINE BROOME

How could I have foreseen the passion with which I would defend the use of Felco secateurs as opposed to friend Rosie's devotion to the Niwaki brand; can this be the same woman who, as a teenager, had such long, painted fingernails that her form teacher sent her home from school?

Mind you, I still like well-manicured nails, these days kept fashionably short and square shaped, so first on my list of Must Have gardening equipment are

Red Back gardening gloves, with textured latex rubber palm and fingertips for excellent grip, with a breathable fabric back, worn over the top of surgical gloves for extra protection and water proofing. Tube of hand cream in glove compartment of car, essential kit! (And while we are talking about personal grooming, in the interests of my dear friend, Health and Safety, a hair band is a Must Have, to hold back a curtain of Lock Down hair.)

Returning to my secateurs of choice, I switched to using Felco when I became a professional gardener. As an amateur, I favoured pretty, floral handled pairs, the sort that you get in Gardeners' Gift Box Sets. After seeing Monty Don's row of well-maintained Felcos, all lined up on his potting shed wall like sentries, I figured if they were good enough for him, they'd be good enough for me. And every time I see a pair of tell-tale red handles poking out of a celebrity gardener's pocket, I feel part of an exclusive horticultural club! There is an increasing sway towards the Niwaki brand, carbon steel, robust, Japanese craftsmanship, but I can't warm to them. My red Felcos are jolly, Niwaki look ferociously serious, and

above all I don't like the sound they make when they cut; it's a sort of clop, whereas Felco has a satisfying snip.

When branches get too thick for secateurs, I used to switch to my long-handled loppers, but since discovering the Bahco folding saw, I rarely use them. Both secateurs and saw fit neatly into the deep pockets of my trousers, so always to hand. Which brings me to workwear.

After nearly a decade of working mostly on my knees, I could not function without my Site Beagle trousers; thick cotton canvas with nine pockets, but most important of all, reinforced knee pockets with built in knee pads. Funny isn't it, even in this day and age, I have had to resort to men's trousers for the highest level of durability, as most women's gardening trousers are lightweight and floral!

Heavy North London clay soil is the bane of my life. I quickly realised, early on, that a regular spade simply didn't cut it! So I switched to a garden fork, reasonably effective on all but the driest of borders. That is, until I discovered the Pedigree Stainless Steel Rabbiting Spade. Also known as a planting spade, its long, narrow, pointed blade cuts

through pretty much anything. The shape of the blade originates from when the spade was used to dig small hunting dogs, such as Jack Russells, out of rabbit holes. Along with a stainless-steel narrow bladed hand trowel and potting scoop, you're pretty much ready for anything. There's nothing quite like the smooth contours of a turned wooden handle and shiny stainless-steel blade to whet my horticultural appetite. It is questionable whether or not the scoop should be up there with my other essentials, but I love it so much, if I could wear it as a piece of jewellery I would!

And finally, as with most things, the old adage buy it cheap, buy it twice applies (with the exception of saws; cheap or dear, in my experience they all wear out in the same time). Always opt for bright coloured handles on your hand-held tools so that you won't lose them in the flower beds, and don't whatever you do, absent-mindedly put them in your trug as you are pruning because, a pound to a penny, you will forget and throw them away with the green waste. Diving headfirst into a refuse bin full of soil waste and thorny prunings is not my idea of exercise!



Plant Alert

ISABELLE FICKER

Gardeners across Britain and Ireland are being asked to report potentially invasive garden plants using the new Plant Alert web page: plantalert.org. Plant Alert is a new, citizen science project aimed at discovering which garden plants have the potential to become invasive and problematic in future. Such plants typically reproduce quickly, are difficult to eradicate and have a longer flowering season than our native plants. Examples that immediately come to mind are shown to the right. Invasive non-native plants are causing major problems for native biodiversity, ecosystems, infrastructure, the built environment and human

health. Most invasive plants were introduced as ornamental garden plants and then spread into the wider environment. To prevent more species becoming invasive, gardeners can report early signs of invasiveness of ornamental plants in gardens.

Non-native invasive plants can:

- Change ecosystems and habitats and have non-biotic effects, such as reducing water flow leading to flooding, or changing the pH or the chemical composition of the soil, or lock up nutrients;
- Outcompete native plants either by habitat change or by spreading so rapidly as to crowd out slower growing species, threatening their long-term survival;
- Take a long time to become invasive. Many of the plants now considered invasive have been growing in the UK for over 100 years and showed no sign of becoming a problem;
- Be expensive to eradicate. It is also very costly to restore degraded habitat, if it can be done at all.



Passion Flowers



Bachelor's Buttons



Houttuynia



Snowberry



Oxalis



Spanish Bluebell



Mexican Fleabane



Japanese Anemones

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