

## Selecting the Right Hoe

article and photographs by Rita Pelczar

**H**OES ARE among the most useful of gardening tools: they grub out rocks and roots, cultivate and mound soil, carve drills for planting seeds, and dispatch weeds. Different types of hoes, however, are better suited to some tasks than others. Although they vary in size, shape, and heft, there are two main types based on how they are used: the draw hoe, which you pull toward you, and the thrust hoe—also called the Dutch hoe—which requires a sweeping, pushing, or push-and-pull action.

### DRAW HOES

Used for chopping down weeds, digging seed drills, mounding soil over stems, and breaking up soil, draw hoes consist of a blade that is usually set at less than a right angle to the handle. The blade may be broad with a flat cutting surface, narrow, pointed, or pronged.

Draw hoes designed for moving soil are usually larger and heftier than those used for weeding. They are often called **grubbing hoes**. Two sizes are available from Gardener's Edge: the seven-and-a-half-inch-wide, eight-inch long, tapered edged grubbing blade easily loosens the soil for planting. The blade of the narrow grubbing hoe, which is four-and-a-half inches wide by eight-and-a-half inches long, is well suited to work tighter areas and is particularly useful for trenching or cutting an edge around a bed.

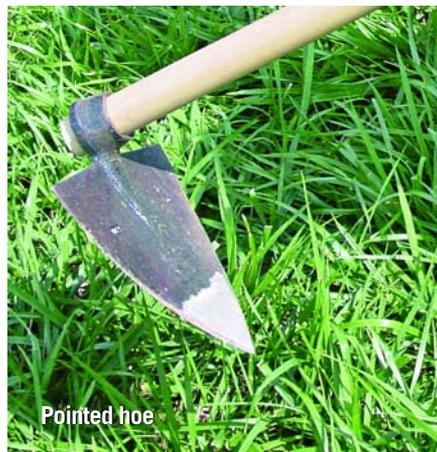
For really tough jobs such as breaking up soil for a new bed, Easy Digging offers a **pointed** or **ridging hoe** made by Bel-lotos that has a beefy, two-pound, eight-



Japanese draw hoe

inch, triangular, forged steel blade that digs through rocks and gravel as well as soil. It's also terrific for mounding soil around potatoes.

The **Polish hoe** from Lee Valley has a 10-inch head that is two blades in one: a narrow grubbing blade on one side and a sharp, pointed blade on the other, and a short, 40-inch handle. It's a useful grub-



Pointed hoe

bing or weeding tool for tight spaces. For large scale weeding chores, I rely on Lee Valley's sturdy **Japanese draw hoe** with its nine-inch-wide blade.

### THRUST (DUTCH) HOES

A thrust hoe cuts weeds at or just below the soil surface. These hoes must be sharpened regularly for maximum efficiency, and they work best on young weeds. They are not intended for moving or breaking up soil.

Their blades come in a variety of shapes. The narrow, flat, rectangular blade of a **collinear hoe** makes for a lightweight tool. The blade is mounted on the handle so that it is parallel to the soil surface and in line with the handle. Designed to be used with a sweeping motion, like a broom, it severs young weeds at their base.

All four sides of the **diamond-shaped thrust hoe** blade are sharp, so whether you push or pull the tool, it cuts the weeds it contacts. Similarly sharp, but shaped

like a broad “V,” the **Winged Weeder** has a tempered steel spring blade. It can also be used to carve seed furrows.

The blade of a **stirrup hoe** forms a flat-bottomed loop that cuts weeds as it is pushed over the soil surface. The **Eco-Hoe** from Clean Air Gardening is a good example: its blade is a single piece of one-eighth-inch steel, sharpened on both edges. The blade does not penetrate the soil deeply, so it can be used around shallow-rooted plants without damaging



Eco-Hoe

them, and because the soil is able to pass through the opening of the loop, there is minimal soil disturbance. The **Circle-hoe®**, available with either a long or short handle, offers similar advantages, and its small circular blade makes for easy weeding even in the tightest spaces.

For a very large vegetable garden, a **wheel hoe** such as the one offered by Valley Oak Tool Company, covers a lot of ground quickly. Its tempered steel



Wheel hoe

## Sources

**A.M. Leonard's Gardeners' Edge**, Piqua, OH. [www.gardenersedge.com](http://www.gardenersedge.com).

**Clean Air Gardening**, Dallas, TX. [www.cleanairgardening.com](http://www.cleanairgardening.com).

**Easy Digging**, Columbia, MO. [www.easydigging.com](http://www.easydigging.com).

**Fisher Industries, Inc.**, Green Valley, AZ. [www.wingedweeder.com](http://www.wingedweeder.com).

**Circle Innovations, Inc.**, Grants Pass, OR. [www.circlehoe.com](http://www.circlehoe.com).

**Lee Valley Tools, Ltd.**, Ogdensburg, NY. [www.leevalley.com](http://www.leevalley.com).

**Valley Oak Tool Company**, Chico, CA. [www.valleyoaktool.com](http://www.valleyoaktool.com).

spring blade, which comes in seven different sizes, is mounted behind a single wheel connected to double handles. As you wheel your way down each row, the blade efficiently cuts weeds just below the soil surface.

### THE BLADE/HANDLE CONNECTION

An important consideration when selecting a hoe is the sturdiness of the blade's attachment to the handle. Blades with a shank that is inserted into the handle and secured by a sheath are generally weaker than hoes with a single-piece blade that wraps around the handle. Heavier blades may have an eye-hole through which the handle is threaded.

### HOW TO CHOOSE?

Since no single hoe will likely meet all your needs, I suggest you select at least one for moving soil and another for weeding. If you have the opportunity, try them out before you buy to determine if their weight and balance are right for you. Then purchase the best quality hoe you can afford. A good hoe will last many years and is well worth the investment.

*Rita Pelczar is a contributing editor for The American Gardener. She wields multiple hoes in her North Carolina garden.*

## WORLD'S #1 TOP PLANT SUPPLY

**#1 PLANT HEALTH EXTRA LIFE**  
**Greatest Guarantee-Offer PROOF Ever**  
 SINCE 1940, unchallenged \$5,000. GUARANTEED to be  
**World CHAMPION**  
 #1 Activator #1 Trans #1 Extra  
**#1 REVIVER, #1 PLANTER, #1 Extra GROWER, #1 Perfector**  
**WORLD'S FAIR SCIENCE-MEDAL-WINNING**

**SUPERthrive® 50 TO ONE**  
**VITAMINS-HORMONES**

USED BY U.S. AGRICULTURE ADMIN. NAVY, AIR, ETC. ALSO BY STATES, CITIES, COUNTIES, UNIVERSITIES.  
**NON-FLUORIDE BIODISABLES** TO ADD TO FERTILIZING for growing  
 GUARANTEED As Advertised in Better Homes & Gardens Landscape Architecture SOURCE: SOURCE-BUCK

RECOMMENDED BY EXPERTS OF TV, RADIO, BOOKS, MAGAZINES, CONFERENCES  
 SCIENCE & INDUSTRY ONLY YOUR REAL WORLD'S FAIR 1940

TOP VALUE  
 ESTIMATED Concentration Drop-A-Cap™ or Drop-A-Gal™

Dozens of the WORLD'S Science MIRACLES IN EACH DROP!

ADD to any fertilizing  
 • 50 INSTANT BIODISABLES™  
 • NORMAL PURE COMPLEXES  
 • From Carbon-Hydrogen-Oxygen  
 • natural organic crystals  
 • Sweep plants from wilting while trying to make them  
 • Unique. Nothing is "like" it.  
 SEE TO BELIEVE!  
 HEALTHIER, FASTER plants!  
 BEAUTY and CROP

ADDED TO 21 FERTILIZERS by 21 Growers

YOU CAN ORDER PINT, QUART, GALLON or DRUM

Billions—PROVEN BALANCED ORIGINAL

ADDED TO 18 FERTILIZERS, by 18 Growers



RECOMMENDED BY NEARLY 1000 BOOKS, CONFERENCES, MAGAZINES, NEWSPAPERS, TVs, RADIOS

**USED BY**  
 FIVE U.S. DEPARTMENTS TO HELP WIN WORLD WAR II  
 THOUSANDS OF GOVERNMENTS, STATE UNIVERSITIES, LEADING ARBORETTUMS, BOTANICAL GARDENS, PARKS SYSTEMS U.S. STATES and CITIES IN MULTIPLE-DRUMS LOTS FLOWERING PLANTS SHOW WINNERS – “everywhere” HEALTHY, TOXICS-FREE FOODS GROWERS  
**UNIQUE. Far easier plant success**

① INDOOR PLANTS	To See MORE NEW FLOWERS and LEAVES, HEALTHIER, STRONGER – MORE BEAUTIFUL
② OUTDOOR PLANTS	TO START NEW ROOT AND FOLIAGE ACTION, SHOOTING DOWN, UP and filling-in, sideways
③ BARE ROOTS	And TO GET MORE FLOWERS, LONGER and MORE BEAUTIFUL
④ FLOWERING	And TO GET MORE FLOWERS, LONGER and MORE BEAUTIFUL
⑤ SEEDLINGS	TO PLANT THEM ALL SAFELY, UNIFORMLY and GROWING MORE STRONGLY
⑥ TREES	TO GET "TWO YEARS' GROWTH IN ONE"?
⑦ FRUITING	For EARLIER, HEAVIER, BEARING?
⑧ BULBS	TO START THEM VIGOROUSLY, Beating Soil-rot, Hastening Better BLOOMING
⑨ SEEDS	To Help GERMINATION Percentage and SPEED EARLIER, BETTER YIELDS, including Vegetables
⑩ LAWNS	To Make QUICKER, deeper, TOUGHER TURF from SEED, SOD, Stolons, Sprigs, HYDRO-seeding

11 XMAS TREES	17 HYDROSEEDING	22 FLOWERING PLANT
12 REFORESTATION	18 LANDSCAPING	COMPETITIONS
13 HYDROPONICS	19 PROPAGATION	23 INTERIORSKAPING
14 FIELD CROPS	20 ANTI-EROSION	24 CUT FLOWERS
15 BONSAI	21 ENVIRONMENTAL	25 WEATHER DAMAGE
16 TISSUE CULTURE	IMPROVEMENT	26 WATER GARDENS

AT CONSCIENTIOUS PLANT DEALERS WORLDWIDE  
 Used, tipped to, and supplied by thousands of conscientious plant-selling firms. On every continent, without salesmen.

REFUSE “just as good,” false, cheaply made, unbalancing substitutes – often 99 1/2% water.

**NOTHING IS AT ALL “LIKE” SUPERthrive® 50 VITAMINS-HORMONES**

Made in U.S.A. by **VITAMIN INSTITUTE** (V)  
 12610 Saticoy Street South, North Hollywood, CA 91605  
 Website [www.superthrive.com](http://www.superthrive.com)