

How to Maintain Your Pruning Shears *by Fritz Clauer*

Pruning shears require regular maintenance: disassembling, cleaning, sharpening, reassembling, oiling and readjusting blade tension. Basic shears have 6 - 7 parts, not counting the lock. More parts require longer maintenance. Disassemble shears over a flat surface or a shallow bowl. The nut could be fairly tight, use a closed-end wrench for this. To clean, try soap and hot water, an old toothbrush with bristles trimmed by half or more, and a pipe cleaner for the inside of the nut. If done over a sink, cover the hole. Dry the parts.

Sharpening in most cases is done only on the 25°- 30° angle cutting edge and requires removing steel. If your shears are of low quality steel, a file may work. If not, there are diamond files, oil stones, water stones and carbide scrapers. With these tools the final strokes should go towards the cutting edge.

If using silicon carbide sandpaper, the final strokes go away from the cutting edge. Sandpapers come in many different grits. (Over 12 years as a part-time knife maker I have accumulated at least 14). If new to sandpaper for sharpening start with one, grit 320. Should things go well, get another one, one step up. I found the best place to buy sandpaper to be Home Hardware in Brooks Landing. They have the best display and selection, and sell single sheets. Grits 120, 150, 180, 220, 320 and 400 are \$ 1.09 each, grit 600 is \$ 1.19 and grit 1500 is \$ 1.29.

Clamp or otherwise secure the part to be sharpened, so you have two free hands.

A wooden stick 1/2" wide or less is required as backing for the sandpaper strips. Popsicle sticks or equivalent may work, the front should be squared. Place sandpaper sheet upside down on a piece of ply- wood, use a steel straight edge or a 12" Scale as a guide, and with a sharp knife cut the required width. Small snap off blade knives like Olfa or X-Acto work well. Drape the strip over the wooden stick and start sanding. Remember to maintain an angle of 25°- 30°. Sanding is messy, more so if using a few drops of water. Once a burr appears on the backside, you are there. Coarse tools develop coarse burrs, fine tools develop fine burrs. With our modern steel it gets more and more difficult to remove burrs. Try slicing the cutting edge into a piece of soft wood or stiff cardboard, or bending the burr back and forth till it breaks off. Wash to remove dust and grit, then dry.

Reassemble, then lubricate the pivot area and the insides of the blades using mineral oil (Baby Oil), one drop should do.

Readjusting the blade tension should be approached slowly. The insides of the two blades are slightly concave, at least they were when new. Tighten the nut just enough till the tip cuts paper, adjusting too much causes wear.

Note: keep shears off the ground and away from soil. Each different grit of sandpaper needs its own cutting board to prevent grit contamination. Practice same day cleaning and oiling. If your pruning shears are still sharp there is no need to take them apart.

Good Luck!