

# The Tool Shed

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## Fall Clean-up Tools

The crisp autumn air is settling in and the days are getting shorter. There is a lot of yard work to get done before putting the garden tools away for the season and replacing them with snow shovels and ice scrapers. The tools that will get the greatest workout between now and the first snowfall are lawn and leaf rakes. Weekends will be set aside to don the old flannel shirt and start to rake, and rake, and rake some more. Not only will people be raking leaves but also raking out between shrubs and in the perennial garden. This is a great time to also rake skimpy thin areas of lawn in preparation for a quick autumn seeding. Collected leaves and old grass can be a great start for that new compost pile you have been talking about.

Leaf rakes were first introduced in the Nineteenth Century as 'leaf brooms' because they were used to both sweep and drag leaves. Leaf or lawn rakes are most often made of bamboo, metal, or plastic. The most common styles are wide and slightly arched, but there are also some wide, flat, and boxy styles.

Bamboo rakes are the most traditional type. They are used around the world and are designed primarily for raking or sweeping leaves. The tines are springy, tightly set, and lightweight. Bamboo rakes are not designed for heavyweight raking, such as raking up wet leaves or for raking on hard surfaces such as cement or stone. Because they are made of a natural material, the tines of the rake can become dry and break, or wear down. If they have dried out and become brittle, soaking the rake in warm water overnight often will bring the rake back to life to use for another season.

Metal-tine, or spring-steel rakes are usually fan shaped with close-set tines that have the flexibility of the bamboo rake but the durability of metal. The tines are either flat or round. Flat tines work well for gathering more leaves, especially wet leaves. The round tined rakes are better for aerating and dethatching lawns as they collect the leaves and dry grass. Enamel coverings on these rakes helps to prevent rusting. Metal rakes often come in different head widths to serve more purposes, such as working in an open yard or raking leaves from in between shrubs and plants. They also have different styles, including a telescoping head that adjusts from a wide shape for lawns to a narrow shape for close work between plants.

Plastic fan rakes are light weight and often wider and flatter than the other types of rakes. The teeth rake are more rigid and the wide span of the rake allows the user to rake and pick up more debris. Size of the rake head and stiffness of the plastic also allow the user to pile leaves and other debris on the rake head itself for transport to the compost pile. Plastic rakes are the easiest of the rakes to maintain because they do not rust or dry out.

The body movements used in raking can set us up for several types of injuries. Back strains, wrist and elbow overuse, and of course the curse of blisters can be lessened or even prevented with some care and smart choices. An ergonomic handle can reduce strain on the back, foam cushioning on the handle will help with blister prevention, and a rake correctly sized for you will help in all areas. Frequent change of grip and switching hands helps both elbows and wrists. My particular favorite technique to prevent injury is to take more frequent breaks and to hold the glass of ice cold lemonade in one hand and then the other.

Just like any other garden tool...there is a right tool for the right job. Raking leaves is no exception. Happy raking.