

The Tool Shed

By Mary Mason and Pat Davis, URI Master Gardeners



Lift it, tote it, and haul it

No matter how much you love it, gardening is often hard work. Gardeners are forever arranging, rearranging, or building just one more garden. Bags of compost, soil, peat, and mulch, or perhaps rocks, bricks, or pavers, are constantly moving in and out of the garden. You need some sort of transportation system that can be used comfortably and safely. The two main styles of garden vehicles are the wheelbarrow and the garden cart.

The wheelbarrow can be traced back to about 200 AD in China. This ancient design is based on the simple tool technology of the lever. The wheel is the fulcrum, the handles are the lifters and as you lift the weight is transferred to the wheels for easy moving. The single wheel design allows you to move easily down small paths or even along a wooden plank. Because of this single wheel design, a wheelbarrow can become unstable and easily tip, especially if the load is not balanced well. When selecting a wheelbarrow, look for a pneumatic tire that is at least 4 inches wide. Check the frame and support system of the wheelbarrow to ensure it is strong and reinforced. Plain tubular steel framing will not be strong enough to hold up to the twisting and torque that is needed to move heavy loads. Most wheelbarrows are produced with a solid tray, which can be used to mix liquids or even cement. Trays are made of steel or plastic but size is the biggest difference in wheelbarrow selection.

Contractor's wheelbarrows are large, deep, strong tools made for heavy jobs and long life. Wheelbarrows sold as gardener's wheelbarrows are smaller, lighter models not designed for the big jobs. The amount and type of garden and yard work you do may determine which model you need. Before you buy a heavy wheelbarrow remember it will be full when you are trying to push it around the yard. While you are still at the store, have someone fill it with a bag or two of fertilizer or cement so you can see how easy or hard it is to maneuver.

As an option, you may want to look at a garden cart instead of a wheelbarrow. The use of a two-wheel cart in the garden is a relatively modern advancement, at least compared to the one-wheel version. The two-wheel cart was the choice of Thomas Jefferson. In his garden journal, Jefferson reported that in a two-wheel cart material could be carried twice as fast as in a single-wheel cart. Because of the two-wheel design, carts cannot tip over as easily and the load that can be carried is much larger, often up to 400 pounds and more in some models.

In recent years several style carts have become popular. Wooden carts sometimes called the *Vermont Cart*, an aluminum folding cart called *Fold-it*, and a plastic removable tray cart, *The Smart Cart* have provided new exciting choices for gardeners. There are various style wheels used but several carts use bicycle style wheels, which allow easy turning and are shock absorbing. The plastic and aluminum materials have produced a lightweight cart that is exceptionally easy to maneuver and store. The cart with the removable tray provides a great basin for mixing cement or liquids, washing the dog, or serving as an iced beverage holder at a party. One disadvantage of some styles is that the solid form construction prevents easily dumping the contents when you get to where you want it. The price of these carts demands that you make sure you love it before you make the investment. Ask around to find someone who has the cart you are interested in and cajole a test drive. Just as with a car, different models have different features so shop around.

I don't want to ignore the molded plastic carts, often with molded plastic wheels, the mesh folding wheelbarrow, or the old red wagon. For small light jobs these devices might be all you need. If you are tall make sure you can push the cart while standing up straight. They might be a good supplement to the large work vehicle but heavy moving requires a tool that can get the job done while easing the work of the job. Call with your local garden tool store, garden center, or hardware store to see which models are available for that test drive.