



Gardener's Gear: Hand Protection

We know our urban harvesters are a resourceful bunch, and can “make do” in the garden. However, a few quality pieces of gear can save time and energy, and make your work go more smoothly. We’ll be listing a few indispensable pieces of equipment every few weeks. And remember, the holiday season isn’t far off. Time to start making a garden wish-list to share with your family and friends!

This the time of year for chilly harvesting and end-of-the-season plant clearing, so you’ll want some good gloves to protect your hands. Here are some tips from our experience in urban farms and gardens.

Pick an Appropriate Glove for the Task

It’s a good idea to have a few gloves on hand (ha!), for different gardening situations.

- For harvesting “itchy” crops like okra and summer squash, try rose gardening gloves (also called gauntlet gloves), which protect your forearm as well. These gloves are great for clearing large plants, too.
- For an all-purpose, seeding-weeding-planting-harvesting glove, try a pair of these [nitrile](#) beauts. We know some gardeners shun gloves – they can make it hard to perform intricate tasks – but even glove naysayers usually like this type. They are tough enough to last for a full season or two, and thin enough still feel the details of what your fingers are doing – even if it’s potting a tiny seedling!
- For heavier garden tasks, like setting posts, building a fence, removing large stones or chunks of concrete, or when the weather turns chilly, opt for a traditional pair of leather gloves. It’s nice to have an unlined pair for summer tasks, and a warm, lined pair for late fall through early spring.
- For shoveling, post-driving, or other repetitive tasks with hand tools, consider a glove with padding in the palm and fingers, to avoid blisters.

Find Gloves that Fit

- Home improvement stores may have a decent selection of gloves, but make sure that the gloves you buy fit well. Gloves that are too big or too small are at best uncomfortable, and at worst, unusable. Gloves that are too big can make it difficult to grip heavy objects, which can be dangerous.
- Women and children’s sizes are harder to come by than men’s sizes. Do a little extra searching at a store to find smaller sizes – usually there are a couple of options available. Internet shopping may be the easiest way to find exactly the gloves you want. [Womenswork](#) carries gloves specifically designed for women and children, as well as men.

Tips

- Goat and deer leather gloves are extremely soft and flexible. These are great for folks who need some heavy duty protection but feel clumsy in a run-of-the-mill pigskin leather glove.

- Unless you are intentionally avoiding animal products, choose leather over synthetic materials for your heavyweight gloves. Leather is flexible and tough, and your gloves will conform to the shape of your hands, over time. As an added benefit, leather also breathes well.
- To condition leather gloves so they don't get stiff, rub them with saddle soap or coconut oil. To clean them, use an old toothbrush to scrub off dirt and grime and then wash them with warm water and hand soap. Wrap them tightly in a towel to absorb most of the water, then fill the fingers with crumpled newspaper or a wooden clothespin, so they hold their shape while air drying.
- Most synthetic gloves can be tossed in the washing machine and require no special care.
- Wearing gloves is certainly the best way to protect your hands in the garden. But anytime you work in cold weather or in the soil, chances are you'll still come inside with chapped, rough hands. For a quick fix, try rubbing your hands with equal parts sugar and olive oil. Then rinse with warm water and pat dry.