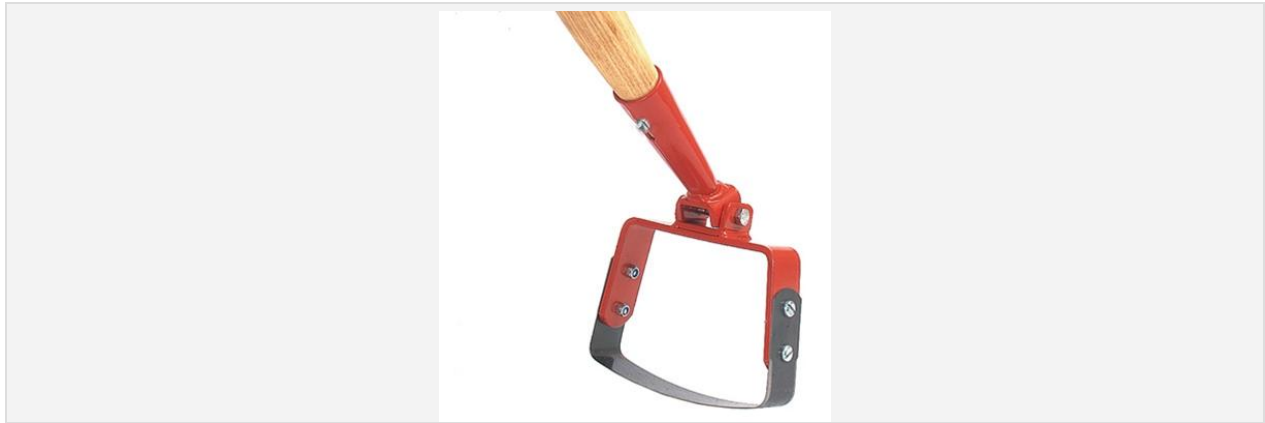




Gardener's Gear: Stirrup Hoe

With the winter and the holiday season soon upon us, we're shifting our focus from garden activities to planning and supplies. Over the next several weeks, we'll bring you some ideas for preparing for next year's season. We'll also list some of our favorite tools and gear that would make great gifts!

My personal favorite tool is the lowly (but handy!) stirrup hoe. Also called the "scuffle" or "hula" hoe, this tool looks like a typical long-handled hoe. The main difference is that the blade is shaped like a stirrup, rather than a flat piece of metal.



This is the "stirrup" end of a stirrup hoe from [Johnny's Selected Seeds](#).

The primary use for the stirrup hoe is to cultivate, or destroy small weeds on the surface of the soil. The hoe is sharpened on both sides of the metal, so it cuts both on a push and on a pull. The stirrup moves back and forth slightly when it's moved back and forth on the soil surface, giving a little bit of extra momentum to the motions.

I love this tool for many different reasons! The stirrup hoe is relatively lightweight and you stand up to use it, so it is a fairly comfortable tool to maneuver. You can see through stirrup of the hoe, making it easier to avoid accidentally chopping down a vegetable plant. The hoe makes quick work of small weeds on the soil surface; it cleanly severs their stems right below the soil line. This method of cultivation almost always kills the weeds. Once you've gotten use to the tool and developed a good working rhythm, it's fun to use and a great workout.

The best way put the stirrup hoe for use during the growing season is to get it out once every week or two and do a shallow cultivation of the garden's soil surface. The best time to cultivate is on a dry, sunny day, so the little weeds don't have a chance to re-root.

Hoeing regularly keeps weeds from establishing and means that weed control equates to standing up and getting a little exercise, rather than crawling around on hands and knees to pull larger weeds. Using a long handled hoe allows you to stand outside of the bed, rather than walking on and compacting the soil within the garden.

You can also use the stirrup hoe regularly for a few weeks, to allow weed seeds to germinate (then eradicate them with the hoe). After several thorough cultivations, mulch with newspapers and straw or leaves, for a very effective method of weed control!

Stirrup hoes are often available at big box stores, but these lower quality tools won't hold up very long, and often have short handles. Here's [the stirrup hoe we like best!](#)