HAND TOOLS
Hand tools are less expensive than long-handled tools. Once your garden has been dug and had the initial soil preparation done, it can be tended entirely with hand tools. Hand tools may be made completely out of metal or have a wood or plastic handle.

Trowel  It has a shovel-like blade attached to a handle.  
Used for digging, planting and smaller plant-diving jobs.

Hand Cultivator  The end of the tool looks like a bird’s foot with three curved tines (sharp projecting points).  
Used to loosen the upper layers of soil, to scratch in fertilizer, and for pulling rocks, leaves, weeds and other debris from the base of plants.

Hand Fork  The end of the tool has straight tines.  
Used to loosen the soil surface, to scratch in fertilizer and to remove debris from around plants.

Hand Hoe  The end is usually triangular, sharpened on the long side.  
Used for weeding, planting, furrow-making and leveling soil.

Dandelion Digger  This tool has a small V-shaped notch at the bottom of a long, narrow metal shaft.  
Used for getting rid of tap-rooted weeds like dandelions without disturbing other plants. Insert the blade an inch or so from the weed, push it into the soil and pop out the weed.

Hand Pruners  Bypass Pruners have two curved blades that cut like a pair of scissors. They make clean cuts and don’t crush stems, which allows plants to heal more quickly.
Anvil Pruners have one cutting blade that cuts against a square-edged lower anvil.  
Used for cutting woody stems. Regular kitchen shears work for most cutting jobs in the vegetable garden. You will need pruners, if you are going to grow bush or tree fruit.

LONG-HANDLED TOOLS
You will use these tools to prepare your garden bed for planting and at the end of the growing season. Since they aren’t used as frequently and are expensive, you might want to arrange to borrow them.

Spade  The rectangular blade has straight sides with a sharp lower end.  
Used to dip in closely planted areas and to dig into compacted soil. It is a good tool to use when you want a clean, sharp cut.

Shovel  The most useful type of shovel is the round-point shovel. You can buy shovels with long handles or shorter handles ending in a D-grip.  
Used for larger lifting and digging jobs, such as removing soil from an area, digging up a garden bed or working compost into a bed.

Spading Fork  A spading fork has four strong, flat tines. It may have a long handle or a shorter one with a D-grip.  
Used for breaking up heavy soil and soil clods when you are preparing a site for
planting. This tool is indispensable for digging in heavy, rocky soils.

**Hoe** Usually hoes have a rectangular or triangular lead with a sharp, flat blade. Some have pointed blade or a moveable blade shaped like a stirrup that slices back and forth.

_used for weeding, to open up a furrow for seed planting or to hill up soil around seedlings and plants._

**Bow Rake** Its head has many short tines on a horizontal bar.

_used for smoothing out the garden site and removing small sticks and stones from the surface. It’s also used to evenly scratch in fertilizer, lime or other soil amendments._

**Lawn Rake** The end is fan-shaped and made of metal, bamboo or plastic.

_used for collecting leaves, grass clippings, twigs and other lightweight lawn and garden debris._

**Pitchfork** This fork has long, narrow, round tines that are pointed at the end.

_used for turning compost and moving mulch or piles of plant material._

**Wheelbarrows and Garden Carts**

Wheelbarrow buckets can be metal or plastic and carts can be either or wood. The wheelbarrow has a single front wheel that makes them easier to maneuver on narrow garden paths. Garden carts can carry heavier loads, because the weight is distributed over two wheels. Carts are more difficult to unload than wheelbarrows.

_used for moving heavy loads such as soil, mulch, compost and garden debris._

**TOOL SHOPPER’S CHECK LIST**

**Handles** – Wood handles should be free of knots, cracks and flaws and straight-grained. Ash is best, because it is light and strong. Hickory is heavier, but just as strong as ash. Avoid fir. Aluminum, steel and fiberglass are stronger, but less shock absorbent than wood.

**Fit** – Look for handles that fit your hand well and are comfortable. For hand tools, make sure the grip area is long enough, so you won’t scrape your hand on the ground when you use it. For long-handled tools, make sure the handle size matches your height, long enough so you can use it without stooping more than necessary.

**Blade or Head Attachment** – In the best quality tools, the blade or head usually ends in a seamless socket that fits cup-like around the handle end. In cheaper tools, the blade or head often ends in a pointed prong that is driven into the handle end. Make sure the metal part of the tool is secured to the handle with rivets. If it isn’t, it may pop off the handle with heavy use.

**Metalwork** – A heavier tool is often best, because higher grades of metal are heavier. You may decide that you prefer a lighter-weight tool. Seams, welds and cutting edges should be even and smooth. Look for metal that is “tempered,” “heat-treated” or “forget.” This process makes it stronger, but forged steel is about twice as expensive as stamped or laser-cut steel.

**Pruners** – Try out pruners to see if they’re easy to operate and feel comfortable. The pressure of the spring keeping them open, how wide they open, and the handle shape may vary considerably.

**Price** – Buy the best you can afford. A well-made tool is easier to use and will last longer. You may find second-hand tools at garage sales and thrift stores.