

Some Thoughts on Sharpening Pruning Shears by Charlie Beck

Sharp cutting tools make the job of pruning a much easier task. Whether it's a chef's knife or a garden pruning shear, a sharp edge is essential. Brand new equipment which have professionally sharpened cutting edges are a pleasure to use. I have never been able to recreate that brand new edge, but I have searched for a quick method to achieve a reasonably sharp edge on my pruning shears.

Years ago, I'd disassemble my pruning shears so that I could sharpen the edge on a bench grinder. This entailed a complete disassembly of the shears to gain access to the cutting edge. Disassembly most often, was not an easy process. Sometimes screws were rusted in place and required an application of liquid penetrant to break loose the threaded connection. Sometimes the screw driver slot was rounded off so an appropriate wrench would be required. Of course all of the parts would need to be guarded from falling on the floor and disappearing under a bench. Reassembly of the pruning shears required tightening the screw to just the right amount of friction between the two halves. This usually took a couple of adjustments.

My bench grinder did not have a guide which was appropriate for pivoting a curved cutting edge at the proper angle. My method was imprecise and I always removed too much material. Pruning shears have a limited number of sharpening cycles. Eventually you need to replace the cutting blade due to material loss from the grinding process.

I searched for a way to sharpen the edge without disassembly of the shears. Also, I wanted to remove less metal during each sharpening cycle.

I found a neat tool for sharpening pruners without disassembly. I profiled it in our July 2011 newsletter.

(http://www.palmbeachpalmcycadsociety.com/newsletter/News_2011_07.pdf) This tool featured a carbide edge which you could scrape along the cutting surface and it provided a quick tune-up to a dulled cutting blade. This worked fine for tune-ups but eventually you need to reestablish the entire taper of the cutting edge.

You can use a file to reestablish the edge taper, but my pruners were made of an alloy which seemed impervious to a metal file. I found a set of diamond coated files at our local Harbor Freight hardware store. A set of 10 small files cost less than \$10. I know these files are available on Amazon and I'll bet they can be found at any hardware store. When new, these diamond coated files can be used to reestablish the cutting blade taper. The problem is they tend to lose their bite and they wear out quickly. These files are also good for quick tune-ups of the cutting edge, just like the carbide sharpener mentioned above.

I searched for higher quality coarse, diamond files which might be more durable. They were quite expensive and I wasn't convinced they would be worth the cost. I needed to find another method to reestablish the cutting blade taper without disassembling the pruners.

It occurred to me, maybe I could use that Dremel Rotary Tool that I had bought years ago. My Dremel Rotary Tool came with an assortment of bits. One of the bits was a tiny drum which came assembled with a replaceable sandpaper band. I gave it a try on my pruning shears and it did a great job of reestablishing the blade taper. Although the new taper wasn't a precise angle, I could fine tune the edge with the diamond file or the carbide scraper. Problem solved!

If you have a Dremel Rotary Tool at your avail, now you have a new use for it.



Dremel Rotary tool,, diamond file set, carbide sharpener