

## Tried & tested / Digging forks

# Digging the dirt!

Geoff Hodge forks over his allotment to try out 12 digging forks



**W**e all need a good garden fork. It's an essential piece of kit for breaking up, turning and aerating the soil, incorporating soil improvers and carefully lifting potatoes, dahlia tubers and the like.

As with most gardening tools, there are numerous things to look out for when buying.

Forks with the largest heads are referred to as digging or garden forks, and these are the ones I've tested. Those with smaller heads are called border forks or ladies' forks, which might be better for those gardeners who can't use the heavier digging version or when you need to use it in a tight space.

Another consideration is whether the tines are made from carbon, alloy steel or

stainless steel. Stainless steel does not stain, corrode or rust as easily as ordinary steel. Generally, stainless steel is lighter too and easier to keep clean. Although generally more expensive than carbon or alloy steel, stainless steel forks are now reasonably priced and good value.

### Comfort

It's essential that you check out your fork first before you buy it to ensure that it's comfortable to use. Prolonged use can cause serious pain or damage your back if not done properly with the right tool.

Check the overall weight and the length of the shaft, because you want to use make it's the right height for you; bending your back excessively will put pressure on your spine and result in backache. Some manufacturers make spades with different shaft lengths, so choose accordingly.

You also want to check that

the tool is comfortable to use; handgrips can be important because you don't want to end up with lots of blisters.

Some manufacturers also supply 'ergonomic' tools, specifically designed to make using them easier.

Several suppliers provide ergonomically-angled or cranked handles and one even has an ergonomic shaped shaft.

### The test

I tested 12 digging forks on my allotment.

As you'd expect from 12 of the best tool manufacturers, they all did an excellent job. So usability, weight, height and comfort in use became major considerations.

I'm 1.73m (5ft 9in) tall, which is pretty average and I found the shorter-handled tools too short to use comfortably over a long time, due to bending a lot when using them.

### B&Q Value Digging Fork

- Length 100cm (29½in)
- Weight 2.07kg
- Shaft Plastic
- Handle Plastic, D-grip
- Tines Carbon steel
- Comfort ★★★★★
- Usability ★★★★★
- Price guide £7.48
- Comment Too short for me and there are uncomfortable ridges on the shaft and handle.



### Burgon & Ball Super Strength Digging Fork

- Length 110cm (43¼in)
- Weight 2.1kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Ash wood, Y-grip
- Tines Stainless steel
- Comfort ★★★★★
- Usability ★★★★★
- Price guide £39.95
- Comment A quality fork that is the right length for me, but the raised shaft socket tongues caught my skin.

### Gardman G-Tools Carbon Steel Digging Fork

- Length 102cm (40in)
- Weight 1.88kg
- Shaft Fibreglass
- Handle Soft plastic, ergonomic crank D-grip
- Tines Carbon steel
- Comfort ★★★★★
- Usability ★★★★★
- Price guide: £14.99
- Comment Good value for money fork

### Yeoman Carbon Steel Digging Fork

- Length 97cm (38in)
- Weight 1.84kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Soft plastic, ergonomic crank D-grip
- Tines Carbon steel
- Comfort ★★★★★
- Usability ★★★★★
- Price guide £12.99
- Comment Good value for money fork, but the contoured handle grip was uncomfortable, but might get better with use.

### Spear & Jackson E-Series Digging Fork

- Length 107cm (42in)
- Weight 2.52kg
- Shaft Stainless steel with soft plastic grip
- Handle Soft plastic, ergonomic crank D-grip
- Tines Stainless steel, flattened front; large central foot tread
- Comfort ★★★★★
- Usability ★★★★★
- Price guide £33.49
- Comment Although the heaviest fork on test, the soft shaft grip and central foot tread made it very comfortable to use.

### Fiskars Power Digging Fork

- Length 111cm (43¼in)
- Weight 2.03kg
- Shaft Plastic coated steel; ergonomic design
- Handle Plastic, D-grip; angled forward
- Tines Flat; boron steel
- Comfort ★★★★★
- Usability ★★★★★
- Price guide £29.99
- Comment The most comfortable to use, due to its long shaft, weight, balance and ergonomic design.

### Wolf-Garten Forged Digging Fork

- Length 100cm (29½in)
- Weight 2.2kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Ash wood, D-grip
- Tines Boron steel
- Comfort ★★★★★
- Usability ★★★★★
- Price guide £45
- Comment Too short for me and one of the heaviest on test, but a good heavy-duty fork.

### Draper Expert Stainless Steel Garden Fork

- Length 101cm (39¼in)
- Weight 1.84kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Ash wood, Y-grip
- Tines Stainless steel
- Comfort ★★★★★
- Usability ★★★★★
- Price guide £24.99
- Comment An excellent digging fork; the best value for money stainless steel model on test.

### Bulldog Tools Premier Garden Fork

- Length 100cm (29½in)
- Weight 2.11kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Ash wood, Y-grip
- Tines Boron steel
- Comfort ★★★★★
- Usability ★★★★★
- Price guide £41
- Comment Although on the short side, this has a good long shaft socket and is comfortable to use.

### Sneeboer Carbon Steel Digging Fork

- Length 119cm (46¾in)
- Weight 2.11kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Ash wood, T-grip
- Tines Flat; carbon steel
- Comfort ★★★★★
- Usability ★★★★★
- Price guide £72.95; supplied by Harrod Horticultural
- Comment Good length for me and length to weight balance ratio, but the raised shaft socket tongues caught my skin.

### Joseph Bentley Stainless Steel Digging Fork

- Length 106cm (41¾in)
- Weight 1.88kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Ash wood, Y-grip
- Tines Stainless steel
- Comfort ★★★★★
- Usability ★★★★★
- Price guide £26.99
- Comment Good length, weight and balance and very comfortable to use over a long time.

**Win our 'best buy'**

We have eight of the Best Buy Joseph Bentley digging forks to give away! Send your name and address to Garden News Digging Fork Giveaway, PO Box 57, Coates, Peterborough PE7 2FE or enter online at [www.greatcompetitions.co.uk](http://www.greatcompetitions.co.uk) Closing date is December 20. Please write 'do not contact' if you don't want to be contacted by us or by carefully selected partner organisations.

### Wilkinson Sword Stainless Steel Digging Fork

- Length 99cm (39in)
- Weight 1.95kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Ash wood, D-grip
- Tines Stainless steel
- Comfort ★★★★★
- Usability ★★★★★
- Price guide £29.99
- Comment A bit too short for me and the sharp edge between shaft and tine socket caught my skin.

## Suppliers

**B&Q**  
0845 609 6688  
[www.diy.com](http://www.diy.com)

**Bulldog Tools**  
01279 401572  
[www.bulldogtools.co.uk](http://www.bulldogtools.co.uk)

**Burgon & Ball**  
0114 233 8262  
[www.burgonandball.com](http://www.burgonandball.com)

**Draper Tools**  
0238 049 4333 for stockist details  
[www.draper.co.uk](http://www.draper.co.uk)

**Fiskars Brands UK**  
01656 655595  
[www.fiskars.com](http://www.fiskars.com)

**Gardman**  
01406 372237  
[www.gardman.co.uk](http://www.gardman.co.uk)  
Supplies direct to stores

**Harrod Horticultural**  
0845 402 5300  
[www.harrodhorticultural.com](http://www.harrodhorticultural.com)

**Joseph Bentley**  
01905 791984  
[www.josephbentley.org.uk](http://www.josephbentley.org.uk)  
Supplies direct to garden centres & stores

**Spear & Jackson**  
0114 281 4242  
[www.spear-and-jackson.com](http://www.spear-and-jackson.com)

**Wilkinson Sword**  
from E P Barrus  
0845 894 1599  
email: [wilkinson-sword@barrus.co.uk](mailto:wilkinson-sword@barrus.co.uk)

**Wolf-Garten from E P Barrus**  
01869 363636  
[www.wolf-garten.co.uk](http://www.wolf-garten.co.uk)

**Yeoman**  
01905 791984  
[www.yeomangarden.com](http://www.yeomangarden.com)  
Supplies direct to garden centres & stores

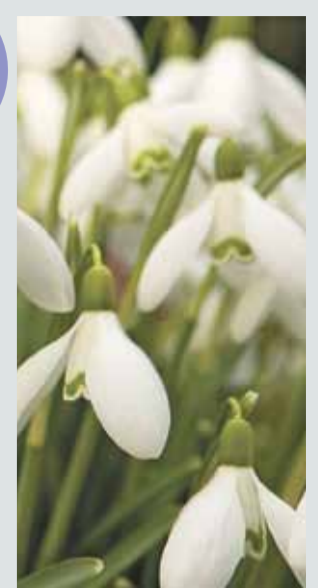
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## 20 snowdrops in the green



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THESE native beauties love to shelter in dappled shade at the base of trees and shrubs, but look equally at home in an alpine garden. Only cultivated stock used. Bulbs supplied in the green, which means

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### Aconites in the green

Easy to establish and virtually maintenance free, supplied as bulbs. The cup-shaped blooms form a glowing carpet of golden yellow flowers each spring. Height 10cm (4in). **25 in the green £9.99** **50 in the green £15.98** **SAVE £4**



### Bluebells in the green

A SEA of English bluebells rekindles memories of springtime woodland walks. These vigorous beauties will multiply each year to create a dense carpet. Height: 25cm (10in). Spread: 8cm (3in). **25 in the green £9.99** **50 in the green £15.98** **SAVE £4**



### Eryngium bourgatii 'Picos Blue'

'Picos Blue' makes a bold statement in a sunny border or gravel garden. Marbled foliage contrasts beautifully with the deeply cut, spiky flower bracts. Height: 55cm (22in). Spread: 50cm (20in). **3 bare-roots £9.99** **6 bare-roots £14.98** **SAVE £5**

## ORDER FORM

**How to claim and order**  
By post Complete the order form, fill in your details and send it with payment to Garden News Free Snowdrops, Dept GN144, PO Box 99, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2SN.  
If paying by cheque, please make payable to TMYP and write your name and address on the back. Or you may complete your credit/debit card details.  
By telephone 0844 573 1686, quoting GN144 (minimum order £10)  
Online [www.plantoffers.com/GN144](http://www.plantoffers.com/GN144)  
Offer closes February 15, 2012. Free snowdrops will be despatched from late February 2012.  
Please note that your contract for supply of goods is with Thompson & Morgan (Young Plants) Ltd. Terms and conditions available upon request. All offers are subject to availability. In the event of unprecedented demand this offer is oversubscribed, we reserve the right to send suitable substitute varieties.

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86661	Aconites in the green (50 bulbs)	£15.98 Save £4		
1321	Bluebells in the green (25 bulbs)	£9.99		
1328	Bluebells in the green (50 bulbs)	£15.98 Save £4		
94150	Eryngium bourgatii 'Picos Blue' (3 bare-roots)	£9.99		
94151	Eryngium bourgatii 'Picos Blue' (6 bare-roots)	£14.98 Save £5		
95180	20 snowdrops in the green (1 order per person)	FREE	1	£3.71 postage
GN144 TOTAL				

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