

Garden Products / Digging spades



The ace of spades

Geoff Hodge looks at 13 of these essential tools and finds the best

EVERYONE needs a good garden spade. It's an essential piece of kit for digging over the soil, incorporating soil improvers and making planting holes.

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

Size of blade head is one of the first considerations. Spades with the largest heads are referred to as digging spades, and these are the ones I've tested. Those with smaller heads are called border spades, or sometimes ladies' spades, a name I've never liked, and there are several other, more specialist types available.

Another consideration is whether the blade is made from carbon or alloy steel or stainless steel. Stainless steel does not stain, corrode or rust as easily as ordinary steel. Generally, stainless steel is lighter and easier to keep clean. Although generally more expensive than carbon or alloy steel, I was pleasantly surprised overall

about what good value it is.

Many of the suppliers in this test supply both carbon steel and stainless steel spades.

Comfort

I know I keep saying it but whenever you buy a gardening tool it's essential that you check it out first to ensure it's comfortable to use. This is particularly true of spades as prolonged digging can cause serious pain or even damage to your back if not done properly with the right tool.

Check the overall weight and the length of the shaft because you want to make sure it's the right height when you stand upright. Bending your back 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, as you don't want to end up with lots of blisters.

Some manufacturers supply what

are known as 'ergonomic' tools, specifically designed to make using them easier. Several suppliers provide ergonomically-angled or cranked handles and one even has an ergonomic shaft.

Another option that will improve your comfort is foot treads on the top of the blade. These provide a wider area for your feet, so the top of the blade doesn't dig into the sole of your footwear.

The test

I tested a range of digging spades on my allotment.

They all did an excellent job and there was little difference between their digging ability. So weight, height and comfort of use were my main considerations.

I'm not that tall, 1.73m (5ft 9in), which is pretty average and I found the shorter handled tools too short to use comfortably over a long time, as I had to bend a lot when using them.

I decided to rate my top 5, including Best Buy, for comfort.

B&Q Value Digging Spade

£6.48

- Shaft length 72.5cm (28½in)
- Weight 2.05kg
- Shaft Plastic
- Handle Plastic, D-grip
- Blade Steel
- Comfort

B&Q, 08456 096688, www.diy.com



Bulldog Tools Premier Garden Spade

£45.55

- Shaft length 71cm (28in)
- Weight 2.22kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Ash wood, Y-grip
- Blade Steel
- Comfort

Bulldog Tools, 01279 401572, www.bulldogtools.co.uk



Draper Expert Stainless Steel Garden Spade

£24

- Shaft length 75cm (29½in)
- Weight 1.86kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Ash wood, Y-grip
- Blade Stainless steel
- Comfort

Draper Tools, 02380 494333 for stockist details, www.draper.co.uk

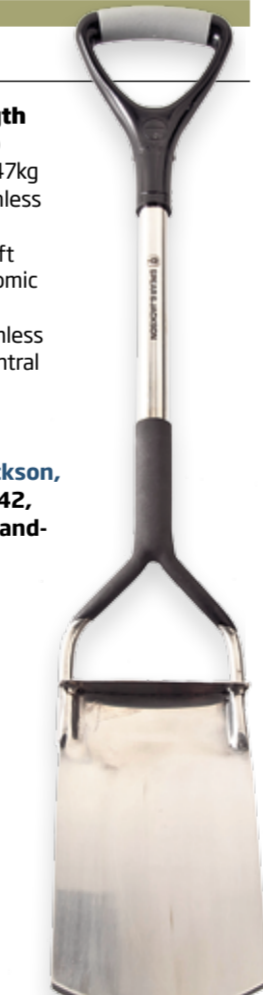


Spear & Jackson E-Series Digging Spade

£30.49

- Shaft length 75cm (29½in)
- Weight 2.47kg
- Shaft Stainless steel
- Handle Soft plastic, ergonomic crank D-grip
- Blade Stainless steel; large central foot tread
- Comfort

Spear & Jackson, 0114 281 4242, www.spear-and-jackson.com



Wolf-Garten Forged Digging Spade

£34.99

- Shaft length 71cm (28in)
- Weight 2.3kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Ash wood, D-grip
- Blade Steel
- Comfort

Wolf-Garten from E P Barrus, 01869 363636, www.wolf-garten.co.uk



Burgon & Ball Digging Spade

£29.95

- Shaft length 81.5cm (32in)
- Weight 2.08kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Ash wood, Y-grip
- Blade Stainless steel; foot treads
- Comfort

Burgon & Ball, 0114 233 8262, www.burgonandball.com



Wilkinson Sword Stainless Steel Digging Spade

£29.99

- Shaft length 71.5cm (28½in)
- Weight 2.05kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Soft plastic, ergonomic crank D-grip
- Blade Stainless steel; foot treads
- Comfort

Wilkinson Sword from E P Barrus, 08458 941599, www.wilkinson-sword@barrus.co.uk



Yeoman Carbon Digging Spade

£12.99

- Shaft length 74.5cm (29½in)
- Weight 1.95kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Soft plastic, ergonomic crank D-grip
- Blade Carbon steel; foot treads
- Comfort

Yeoman, 01905 791984, www.yeomangarden.com Supplies direct to garden centres & stores



Top 5 spades

Wilko Stainless Steel Digging Spade

£13

- Shaft length 77.5cm (30½in)
- Weight 1.93kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Ash wood, Y-grip
- Blade Stainless steel; foot treads
- Comfort

Wilko, 08000 329329, www.wilkinsonplus.com Supplies Wilkinson stores nationwide



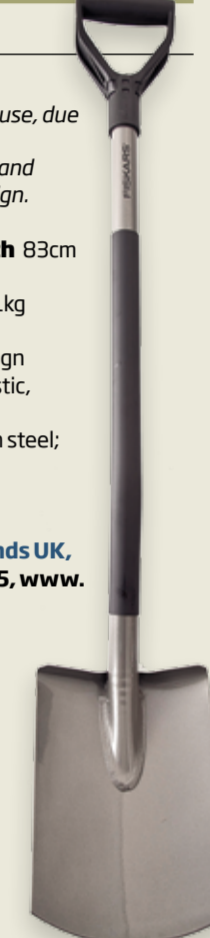
Fiskars Power Digging Spade

£29.99

The most comfortable to use, due to its length, weight and ergonomic design.

- Shaft length 83cm (32¾in)
- Weight 1.91kg
- Shaft steel
- Handle Argonomic design
- Blade Boron steel; foot treads
- Comfort

Fiskars Brands UK, 01656 655595, www.fiskars.com



Harrod Horticultural Sneeboer Large Spade

£71.45

- Shaft length 85.5cm (33¾in)
- Weight 1.93kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Ash wood, T-grip
- Blade Stainless steel; foot treads
- Comfort

Harrod Horticultural, 08454 025300, www.harrodhorticultural.com

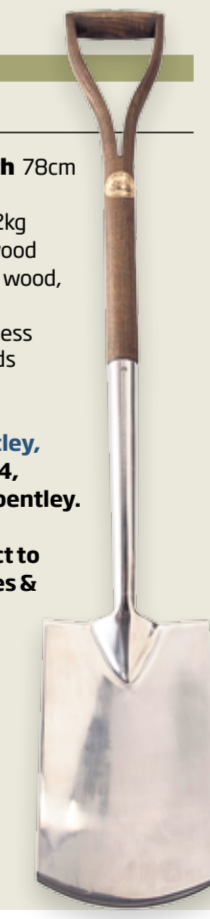


Joseph Bentley Stainless Steel Digging Spade

£26.99

- Shaft length 78cm (30¾in)
- Weight 1.92kg
- Shaft Ash wood
- Handle Ash wood, Y-grip
- Blade Stainless steel; foot treads
- Comfort

Joseph Bentley, 01905 791984, www.josephbentley.org.uk Supplies direct to garden centres & stores



Gardman G-Tools Stainless Steel Digging Spade

£19.99

- Shaft length 73.5cm (29in)
- Weight 1.8kg
- Shaft Fibreglass
- Handle Soft plastic, ergonomic crank D-grip
- Blade Stainless steel; foot treads
- Comfort

Gardman, 01406 372237, www.gardman.co.uk Supplies direct to garden centres & stores

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It's the ideal time to plant new shrubs - find out how to do it Page 11

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www.liveforgardening.com

GN TOP TIP
Tackle digging in small sections and take regular breaks to minimise strain on your back