



Tried & tested *garden trowels*

Geoff Hodge tests those essential hand tools - trowels

A GOOD trowel is an essential piece of gardening equipment. A trowel and hand fork were the first gardening tools I owned.

You need a trowel to dig holes for planting out small and young plants, bulbs and potato tubers, among other things. They are also used for breaking up the soil, mixing in fertilisers and removing weeds, although a hand fork is often a better choice for these jobs.

When selecting a trowel for yourself, there are a couple of things you should look out for. Obviously, larger blades allow

you to dig bigger holes easily and the longer the handle the more comfortable they are to use, especially if you have large hands. You will need to decide whether you want a blade made from carbon or alloy steel or stainless steel.

More and more manufacturers are providing stainless steel tools that are very reasonably priced. Stainless steel gives excellent rust resistance and ease of movement through the soil without clogging up.

The test

I tested the trowels on the good tilth in my raised beds and on

my slightly more sticky clay soil. I tested how easily they dug out holes for planting bulbs and spring-bedding plants and dug up potatoes.

I always like wooden-handled tools and my own trowel has a wooden handle. But although the wooden-handled trowels on test were all good, I actually found those with soft plastic handles the most comfortable and easy to use.

Those with a beveled bottom edge, pointed end or sharpened sides were the easiest to use in the clay soil, especially when it was dry and hard.

Bulldog Tools Premier Hand Trowel £10.50

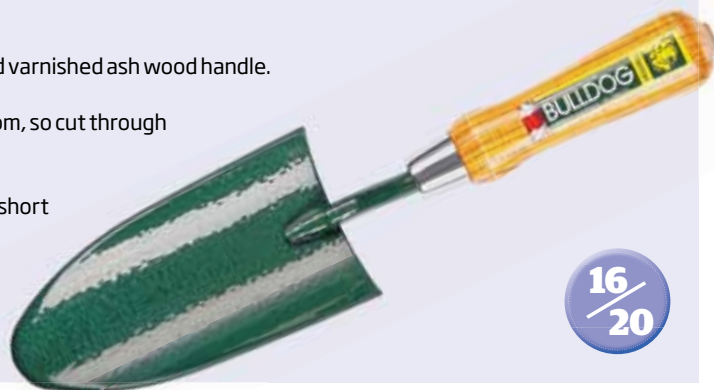
Blade size 15cm x 8cm (6 x 3 1/4in) **Handle length** 11cm (4 1/4in)

Quality ★★★★★
Coated carbon steel blade and varnished ash wood handle.

Performance ★★★★★
The blade has a beveled bottom, so cut through the soil well.

Usability ★★★★★
For me, the handle is a bit too short and after extensive use the end rubbed the palm of my hand.

Value ★★★★★



16/20

Wilkinson Sword Stainless Steel Hand Trowel £10.99

Blade size 15cm x 8.5cm (6 x 3 3/8in) **Handle length** 13.5cm (5 1/2in)

Quality ★★★★★
Stainless steel blade and ash wood handle.

Performance ★★★★★
The thickest blade of the trowels tested, which didn't cut through the clay soil as well as some of the other trowels tested.

Usability ★★★★★
It doesn't have a bulbous front to the handle, so there was nothing to support my thumb and my hand tended to slip.

The longest wooden handle on test, so good for gardeners with large hands.

Value ★★★★★



16/20

Draper Tools Expert Stainless Steel Heavy Duty Hand Trowel £6.49

Blade size 15cm x 8cm (6 x 3 1/4in) **Handle length** 10.5cm (4 1/8in)

Quality ★★★★★
Stainless steel blade and ash wood handle.

Performance ★★★★★
The blade has a beveled bottom, so cut through the soil well.

Usability ★★★★★
For me, the handle was a bit too short and after extensive use the end rubbed the palm of my hand. It doesn't have a bulbous front to the handle, so there was nothing to support my thumb and my hand tended to slip.

Value ★★★★★



19/20

Gardman Moulton Mill Stainless Steel Potting Trowel £7.99

Blade size 15cm x 7cm (6 x 2 3/4in) **Handle length** 12cm (4 3/4in)

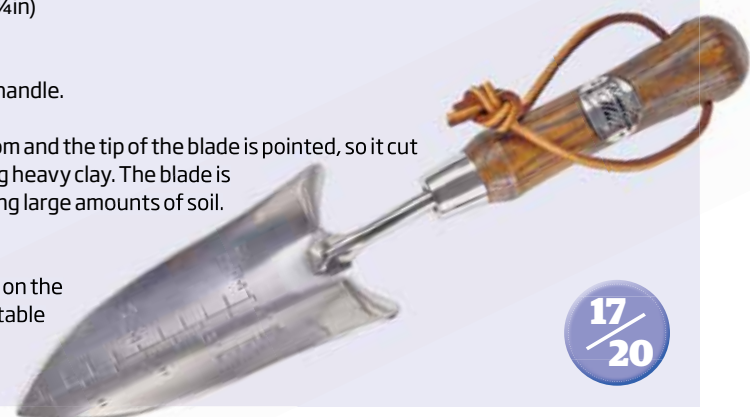
Quality ★★★★★
Stainless steel blade and ash handle.

Performance ★★★★★
The blade has a beveled bottom and the tip of the blade is pointed, so it cut through the soil well, including heavy clay. The blade is narrow, which prevented lifting large amounts of soil.

Usability ★★★★★
The lightest trowels on test.

The raised metal name badge on the handle did become uncomfortable after a while.

Value ★★★★★



17/20

Joseph Bentley Stainless Steel Hand Trowel £8.49

Blade size 15 x 9cm (6 x 3 1/2in) **Handle length** 13cm (5 1/8in)

Quality ★★★★★
Stainless steel blade and oak wood handle.

Performance ★★★★★
Reasonably thick blade, which didn't cut through the clay soil as well as some of the other trowels tested.

Usability ★★★★★
One of the heaviest trowels on test, but it was still easy to use.

Value ★★★★★



17/20

Sneeboer Short Fat Trowel £27.95

Blade size 15cm x 9.5cm (6 x 3 3/8in) **Handle length** 12.5cm (5in)

Quality ★★★★★
Stainless steel blade and cherry wood handle.

Performance ★★★★★
The blade has sharpened edges and a sharp point, so it cut through my clay soil easily. It was the widest on test and almost flat, so lifted a good amount of soil when making holes.

Usability ★★★★★
It doesn't have a bulbous front to the handle, so there was nothing to support my thumb and my hand tended to slip. It has little or no tang, so my knuckles were always close to the soil.

Value ★★★★★
Supplied by Harrod Horticultural



16/20

Spear & Jackson Select Stainless Steel Trowel £8.99

Blade size 15cm x 8.5cm (6 x 3 3/8in) **Handle length** 15cm (6in)

Quality ★★★★★
Stainless steel blade, handle with soft plastic palm and thumb grip and hard plastic finger grip.

Performance ★★★★★
The raised front 'stop' on the handle prevented hand slippage, especially when wet, and the handle thumb point allowed me to exert pressure when inserting into the soil.

Usability ★★★★★
Very comfortable and easy to use thanks to the contoured handle. The extension at the end of the handle provided some protection to my knuckles from making contact with the soil.

Value ★★★★★



18/20

Darlac Garden Trowel £7.99

Blade size 15cm x 8cm (6 x 3 1/4in) **Handle length** 16cm (6 1/4in)

Quality ★★★★★
Stainless steel blade and soft plastic handle.

Performance ★★★★★
The blade has a beveled bottom, so cut through the soil well. The raised front 'stop' on the handle prevented hands slipping, especially when wet, and the handle thumb point allowed me to exert pressure when digging.

Usability ★★★★★
Very comfortable and easy to use thanks to the contoured handle. The extension at the back end of the handle provided some protection to my knuckles from making contact with the soil.

Value ★★★★★



20/20

WIN OUR 'BEST BUY' GARDEN TROWEL

We have 12 of the BEST BUY Darlac Garden Trowels to give away! Send your name and address to Garden News Trowel Giveaway, PO Box 57, Coates, Peterborough PE7 2FE or enter online at www.greatcompetitions.co.uk Closing date is September 25. Please write 'do not contact' if you don't want to be contacted by us or by carefully selected partner organisations.

Burgon & Ball Stainless Hand Trowel £8.95

Blade size 14cm x 8cm (5 1/2 x 3 1/4in) **Handle length** 12cm (4 3/4in)

Quality ★★★★★
Stainless steel blade and ash wood handle.

Performance ★★★★★
The relatively thin blade cut through the soil very well.

Usability ★★★★★
One of the lightest trowels on test and easy to use.

Value ★★★★★



18/20

Wolf-Garten Wide Trowel £9.99

Blade size 16cm x 8cm (6 1/4 x 3 1/4in) **Handle length** 13cm (5 1/8in)

Quality ★★★★★
Cold-rolled steel and hard plastic handle with soft plastic palm and finger grip.

Performance ★★★★★
The blade has beveled sides and a pointed tip so it cut through the soil very well, including heavy clay.

Usability ★★★★★
Large neck at the front of the handle and contoured palm and finger grips prevented my hand slipping and ensured good control.

Value ★★★★★



16/20

Yeoman Stainless Steel Hand Trowel £7.99

Blade size 14cm x 8cm (5 1/2 x 3 1/4in) **Handle length** 14cm (5 1/2in)

Quality ★★★★★
Stainless steel blade and soft plastic handle.

Performance ★★★★★
The raised front 'stop' on the handle prevented my hands slipping, especially when wet, and the handle thumb point allowed me to exert pressure when digging.

Usability ★★★★★
Very comfortable and easy to use, thanks to the contoured handle.

Value ★★★★★



18/20

SUPPLIERS: Some suppliers only sell to gardening stores, but you can often buy their products online. *Bulldog Tools:* 01279 401572. *www.bulldogtools.co.uk* *Burgon & Ball:* 0114 233 8262. *www.burgonandball.com* *Darlac:* 01753 547790. *www.darlac.com* *Draper Tools:* 02380 494333 for stockist details. *www.draper.co.uk* *Gardman:* 01406 372237. *www.gardman.co.uk* *Harrod Horticultural:* 08454 025300. *www.harrodhorticultural.com* *Joseph Bentley:* 01905 791984. *www.josephbentley.org.uk* *Spear & Jackson:* 0114 281 4242. *www.spear-and-jackson.com* *Wilkinson Sword* from EP Barrus. *08458 941599.* *www.wilkinsonsword-tools.co.uk* *Wolf-Garten* from EP Barrus. *01869 363636.* *www.wolf-garten.co.uk* *Yeoman:* 01905 791984. *www.yeomangarden.com*



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