



# Editor's Choice

## Tamsin cuts to the chase and picks a gardening knife for general purpose

**N**o one seems to hang on to a pocket knife for long. They are like pens - soon borrowed and seldom returned - so if you find a good one, put your name on it. When I lectured on practical horticulture, my students and I used them almost daily to take cuttings, for grafting and for extracting seeds. Those that propagate will find a sharp knife almost vital, and professionals often own knives specifically designed for grafting and budding. Grafting knives have a straight blade to help make very accurate cuts, and budding knives have a straight main blade with a tiny blade on top. Unless this is your craft, I think you can safely get away with a general-purpose gardening or pruning knife such as I have tested.

I had never used a pruning knife until this trial, as I feel far more at home with secateurs or a small saw, but I can see that they might be easier to sharpen than secateurs. A pruning knife has a blade that curves downwards, similar to the blades on the general-purpose option. The knives I tested are all folding and of similar size, so it was tricky to find much difference between them. The trial, however, has made me aware of how useful they can be. Whichever knife you choose, the secret is to keep it sharp - a knife is only as good as the care it receives. Wipe all blades with an oily rag after a day's use, and sharpen when required.

I find a knife very handy for harvesting vegetables. My grandmother used to sit on the steps in the kitchen garden with a washing-up bowl and a penknife, destripping runner beans and slicing them. This made perfect sense, as going back to the kitchen to do this means you would need to make an extra trip back out to the compost heap. A pocket knife is the perfect gift for any gardener/cook - just make sure that you give the recipient a penny with the present, or it's bad luck.

You'll notice that the price ranges are extreme - if you tend to lose things, then maybe the cheaper options are for you. All of the knives can be lethal if used carelessly - closing them is when accidents tend to happen, so please take care.

With thanks to Stockton Bury Gardens, Hereford. [www.stocktonbury.co.uk](http://www.stocktonbury.co.uk)





*When I lectured on horticulture, I used a knife almost daily to take cuttings, for grafting or for extracting seeds*

**1** The Draper Slimline Pruning Knife offers a flat body that would slip into any pocket. Its body and blade are stainless steel, so it's cold to the touch, which in winter would be a downside; I wouldn't want to use a knife with gloves on. This knife comes with a D-ring onto which a strap can be attached (strap is included). Great for hanging the knife up, but was on occasion annoying when working with it - once taken off I'm sure I'd lose it (easily removed with a quick-release clip). To close the blade, you press the spring on the handle. The blade cuts well. Priced very reasonably at just £3.75.

**2** The Marshalls Garden Knife is one of my favourites. In the main picture (left), it is the attractive knife at the front of the pot. It offers a large stainless steel blade and a handy D-ring at the end of the natural ash handle. There is a spring button to help close the knife, but I still found it

a little tricky. I think this is because it is new though - all a little stiff. It doesn't come with brass linings to prevent the blade rusting, but for the price it's a very good value knife. Priced at £9.95.

**3** The Burgon & Ball Folding Gardener's Pocket Knife is made in Sheffield, which makes it appealing to me. It offers a high-carbon steel blade, which will retain a sharper edge for longer. The lining that the blade folds into is solid brass, which will avoid rust - it also gives the tool a quality look and explains its price. It doesn't offer a groove in the blade to help you open it, but as the blade sticks out a fair way when closed, it is easy to open. The handle is made of rosewood, which is warm to the touch and looks great - this would make a wonderful gift. I wouldn't want to lose this one, so it's my **EDITOR'S CHOICE**. Priced at £27.95.

**4** The Felco Victorinox knife offers a curved hardwood handle and solid brass linings, justifying its price. The blade is fairly small, but effective, and there is a groove in the blade to help you open it out. As with the Burgon & Ball knife, there is no hook on the handle to hang it up. A great little knife, but I prefer a smoother rosewood handle. I'm sure, being Felco, that it would last you well, and is a great option for the professional. Priced at £26.99.

**5** Spear and Jackson's Large Garden Knife offers a blade similar in size to the Marshalls knife, and which curves downwards. Having a plastic handle makes it quite lightweight, and the red colour is a great idea, making it easy to find after putting down. It has a D-ring at the end of the handle for hanging up, and a generous groove notched in the blade to help open and close it. Priced at £16.49.



#### STOCKISTS

● **Draper Slimline Pruning Knife**

Go to [www.draper.co.uk](http://www.draper.co.uk) for stockists

● **Marshalls Garden Knife**

Tel: +44 (0)1480 443390. Mail order from [www.marshalls-seeds.co.uk](http://www.marshalls-seeds.co.uk)

● **Burgon & Ball Tel:** +44 (0)1152 338262. [www.burgonandball.com](http://www.burgonandball.com)

● **Felco Victorinox** Tel: 0844 5572233. [www.crocus.co.uk](http://www.crocus.co.uk)

● **Spear and Jackson Large Garden Knife** [www.spear-and-jackson.com](http://www.spear-and-jackson.com)

*Also available from some garden centres*