



Editor's Choice



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Tamsin scratches the surface to choose the best garden rakes

There's a whole range of different garden rakes available to us, but I am testing those that are used to prepare the soil for planting - good old-fashioned Mr McGregor rakes. It's not that I have anything against the landscaping and lawn rakes, but I'm sure you'll agree that they all do very different things.

For me, when the garden rakes comes out, it marks the end of the hard work of digging and the start of the planting or sowing. For best results, a newly dug bed needs treading and then the joy of raking can begin. There is a definite knack to using a rake, and when I started work in the parks department, the team soon put me straight on that. It takes practice - a little like wielding an icing knife

over a cake (not something I have perfected).

Having recently cleared a border to take back to lawn, I have plenty of bare soil to put this selection to the test. The most important thing for me is that the rake isn't too heavy, as the movement made when raking is actually quite alien to us, so the easier you can make it on yourself, the better. It is a task that should be enjoyed and never done in a hurry or when the soil is very wet - if you have used your tool well, then you should be able to step back and admire the end result. I can see why Japanese gardeners find so much relaxation in creating Zen gardens with their rakes.

This type of rake can also be used to create seed drills in the vegetable patch - this, again,

is an art to be studied. If you give these tools some thought, you soon realise that they are the paintbrushes of the garden. A romantic notion, I know, but if you come across an old worn-down rake, it's rather magical.

The design of the garden rake has changed very little in the past century. You may notice that some rakes in this trial have curved teeth, but other than that, there is very little that can be done to improve them, so your choice is simply down to weight, durability and the comfort of the handle.

Having five rakes in the garden on trial is a little tricky. Most of us have experienced the pain of a bump on the head from a rake handle. Never leave a rake lying flat - always leave it propped up.



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1 Wilkinson Sword offers a Space Saver Soil Rake head in their range. Invest in the separate handle, and you can use several different tool heads with it. The width of this rake is 30cm, and the teeth are slightly curved and made from cold-rolled steel. It's a neat little rake and having one handle that fits all makes sense if you have storage issues. I still prefer independent tools though. The handles are lightweight and available in three lengths. The medium-length handle costs £9.99 and is a length of 120cm. This is very lightweight and comfy. The rake head is priced at £16.99.

2 The Sneeboer rake has the longest handle of the bunch at 166cm long - if you are tall, then this is the rake for you. The heads of my selection are all around 30cm in width. The stainless-steel teeth are fine and sharp, so this

rake would cope well with fairly compacted soil. The plain cherry-wood handle and the rake head are hand crafted in Holland. Sneeboer also sells a tool maintenance kit to keep your tools in perfect condition. A great rake, but pricey at £62.95.

3 The Fiskars Stainless Steel Garden Rake was just perfect for me, so this is my **EDITOR'S CHOICE**. It offers a comfy rubber-coated handle that gives plenty of grip, and has a handy hook at the end so you can hang it up. The stainless-steel head offers my preferred choice of straight teeth and the best thing about it is how light it is. Definitely the ladies' choice. A good-looking tool with a modern twist. Priced at £28.87.

4 Bulldog offer this Premier Garden Rake with 12 or 14 teeth. The 12-toothed version has a

head of 28cm and there is pence between them in price. The ash handle is 107cm. Bulldog tools have been made in the UK for 230 years and quality is the company's trademark. This was my husband's preferred tool, but I found it slightly on the heavy side. Priced at £30.90.

5 The Royal Horticultural Society endorses the Ground Rake from Burgon and Ball. It has an overall length of 169cm, and the handle is made of ash. The stainless-steel head has a width of 35cm, and, unlike the others, it offers a bow-shaped support between the handle and the head. This is to offer some give, but it was tricky to tell if it worked. A lovely rake, but I prefer the old-fashioned style without the bow - you feel closer to the soil that way. Priced at £26.95.

CONTACTS

● Wilkinson Sword Space Saver Soil

Rake Available in most garden centres and www.wilkinsonsword-tools.co.uk

● **Sneeboer rake** is available from Harrod Horticultural. Tel: 0845 4025300, or visit www.harrodhorticultural.com

● **The Fiskars Garden Rake** is available from www.qualitygardentools.com.

● **The Bulldog Premier Garden Rake** is available from most garden centres or for your nearest stockist, visit www.bulldogtools.co.uk

● **The Ground Rake** is available mail order from www.burgonandball.com Tel: +44 (0)1142 338262.



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