

The Community VOICE

Rohnert Park, Cotati, & Penngrove

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Restoring the tools of restoration

By Wade Belew
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Whether you are an avid gardener or restoration practitioner, having the right tool for the job makes a huge difference. It can turn a chore into something you look forward to doing.

Cotati Creek Critters (CCC) have planted and maintained hundreds of native trees and shrubs along the Laguna in Cotati. Having the right tools in good condition allows our volunteers to work efficiently and safely.

We've been able to acquire about half our tool collection from donations, garage sales and flea markets. Often, it just takes a little imagination and ingenuity to repair a damaged tool. Doing so saves on two ends - new resources don't have to be extracted and processed to satisfy a need, and landfill space or energy needed for conventional recycling is avoided.

Another advantage can be finding older, American-made or other quality tools that have been replaced in the current market with imported junk. "They don't make it like they used to" is sadly true, at least when it comes to many tools.

Two of the most common issues with used tools are damaged handles and rusty metal. Both problems are generally caused by leaving the tools outside. A common tool that can easily be refurbished and put back in service are two handled pruners or "loppers" and hedge clippers.

Besides rust, another problem can be that the tangs of metal inserted into the wooden handles become loose as the wood splits.

To refurbish rusty loppers with loose handles I'd begin by removing the bolt that holds the two halves together. I'd take each side to an 8-inch bench grinder and use a wire wheel to remove the rust.

Next, I'd use the grinding wheel to sharpen the beveled edge of the cutting tool. Keep the same angle and grind slowly to preserve the temper of the steel.

One of the most common sharpening errors is to add a bevel to a previously flat-ground surface. Any scissor-like cutting tool like loppers can be rendered useless if flat surfaces are beveled by mistake.

When it comes to handles, the cost of replacement and the time it takes to do it can be more trouble than it is worth. I usually do not take used tools if they need handles replaced unless they happen to be particularly nice.

Loose handles often can be easily repaired using the new polyurethane adhesives ("Gorilla Glue" and others). It works great for shovels, garden rakes, pruners and more.

To begin, stand the tool up with the metal parts on top. Use masking tape wrapped around the handle to create a "well" above the insertion point of steel into the handle, then fill with glue. Polyurethane glues expand to fill cracks and voids effectively. Weathered handles can be sanded with 40 and 80 grit sandpaper, then wiped with linseed oil.

Cotati Creek Critters will be hosting a workshop Sunday entitled "Putting the Grass in 'Grass-roots' Restoration" from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Ladybug Lot (Cotati City well lot no. 2) next to Ladybug Park. The workshop will cover three topics: Hand tools, basic plant propagation, and planting techniques.

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