

Versatile gardening tool is one you'll dig

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I faced a dilemma. I'd bought a rainbow of pansies at half-price and needed to prepare a bed for them. But it had been years since I'd dug a flower bed from scratch, and I was more than a little concerned about my late-middle-age, cranky back.

I found the solution in a lightweight, versatile new product.

The immodestly named Perfect Garden Tool consists of several well-designed parts. The main pieces are two handles, one long and one short, constructed with ergonomics in mind. Onto these the gardener fits any of seven different heads: hoe, spade, cultivator, aerator, rake, trowel, planter. The kit includes a dense foam pad to cushion your knees for hand work.

I'm a person of only middling handiness, but I found it easy to attach the hoe to the long handle by sliding it in place and inserting the pin to secure it.

This arrangement weighs less than 5 pounds but provided plenty of force to help me break up a moderately heavy clay soil.

The horizontal handle is 16 inches wide and tightly coated with foam to provide a comfortable grip. The nonskid foot-push bar is 7.5 inches wide.

I used less force and felt far less vibration in the metal handle than with standard wood-handled spades and forks.

When the bed was ready, I set aside the long handle and quickly fitted together the parts for the 15-inch-long trowel. This handle is a foam-coated T shape. There's also an angled 8-inch extension that allows a longer reach on your knees or in a raised bed. A child could use it while standing.

I finished my new flower bed with far fewer aches than usual. I packed up all the parts in the tough canvas tote and walked away with the Perfect Garden Tool slung over my shoulder by its adjustable carrying handles. The whole kit weighs 15 pounds.

The only remaining test of whether the Perfect Garden Tool lives up to its name is how durable it proves as I tend my new pansies and prepare vegetable beds for cold crops.

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