

All About Knife Sharpening

by Kurt A. Schefken

Ever since early man chiseled his primitive spears and knives from pieces of rock, keeping them sharp has been a prime part of maintaining tools. When new settlements were founded in Colonial times, often the first thing that would be installed would be grinding wheel because the settlers realized that they could not get much work done if they didn't keep their tools sharpened.

The sharpening tools we use today are still similar to the grinding wheels and whet stones of yore. The only real difference is that there is just a lot more power behind today's tools. Where the colonials had to use water wheels to power their grinding wheels, we plug them into electricity for a fast, easy job.

If you are looking for a knife sharpener that will serve a long time, you will certainly have a wide choice to choose from. A bench top grinder, for example can be used just as easily for sharpening gardening tools as for sharpening ax blades.

Chain saws need to be sharpened frequently for the most efficient use. Not only will it give you a better cut for whatever you are cutting, it will also be safer to use. An abrasive end is attached to an electric drill and as the drill rotates, you hold the saw blade against it to sharpen it. Make sure you get a chain saw sharpener with multiple tips, since they wear down quickly.

There is a knife and scissor sharpener manufactured by Tormek that uses water to reduce friction. This type of grinder is a complete package, with leather strops. Some prefer to use a paper wheel to hone the edges of the knife.

One of the main features you want to look for in a knife sharpener is versatility. Can you do any size knives, including long knives? Can you strop the edges? Can you find replacement parts easily? These are important considerations, especially if you are planning on buying a high grade maintenance tool that can cost hundreds of dollars.

Heavy duty sharpeners such as this are usually for the serious woodworker, or the landscaper who is using his chainsaw continually and has to have it constantly sharpened. There are less expensive options for the hobbyist or homeowner. You may even be able to make do with a manual, hand held knife sharpener such as is found in a butcher shop. There are other versions, such as the wheeled knife sharpener (the blade is drawn between two wheels), or any abrasive material against which the knife is drawn.

You can sharpen a knife well with both a manual or electric sharpener; the skill of the knife sharpener is probably the more important ingredient in determining how well a knife is sharpened. Holding the knife at the proper angle is critical. You can get information in the form of videos or books that will educate you about knife sharpening if this is an important area for you.