

Shovels

Famous for:

A famous mail-order catalog and Alan Chadwick had much to do with starting gardeners to believe short-handled, forged-metal digging spades and forks were the superior digging tools. I like to call it the impact of Myth & Hawkin’.

The Flip Side of the Coin:

Many gardeners have been suckered into believing the only tools for cultivating soil are the short-handled, forged English variety. A study entitled “*The Ergonomics of Shoveling and Shovel Design—an experimental study*” by Andris Freivalds of the Department of Industrial and Management Systems Engineering at Pennsylvania State University (*Ergonomics*, 1986, Vol. 29, No. 1, 19-30) confirms the awkwardness, if not unhealthiness, of these increasingly popular tools. This study found that the short, D-handled shovel, with a pointed blade, “was universally ranked lowest for...[perceived exertion of the shoulder and arms, low back] and [lowest rated shovel overall], due to its short handle requiring a stooped posture.” Perhaps most important to the health of real gardeners, Freivalds found that “low-back compression forces [with the short-handled shovel] were higher than for most other shovels.” As it turns out, the best places for the short-handled English forged shovel and fork is either in a deep, wide trench or a coal mine—not common features in suburbia!

