

## Sharpening your tools – secateurs/loppers; grafting knives; general knives →

Dave Askin, 24 Aug 2022 for Nourish.

I love sharp knives, secateurs, loppers, chisels... and love getting my butcher's knives sharp enough to shave the hairiness from the back of my hand.

**The key to getting a sharp edge** is to understand the process of →

1. removing a shoulder,
2. creating a burr (and knowing when you have created a burr)
3. removing the burr – with fine stone, steel and possibly a leather strop/belt to polish an edge for super sharp – grafting knife / butchers knife.

**The key to getting the right kind of edge is thinking purpose and tasks→**

An axe needs a very different kind of edge to a grafting knife. One bashes through wood – needing quite a bit of shoulder to protect the sharp edge, the other – grafting knife needs a thin blade, that will be razor sharp and cared for carefully.

Last key – the angle to work at! We'll get to angle as we go along – that varies with purpose. A steeper angle for an edge that must cope with tough jobs – loppers/secateurs compared with grafting knife where emphasis is on really fine, very sharp.

**Sharpening an ordinary knife is a good place for us to start.**

Most of the (hard) work of sharpening is about removing the shoulder on a knife. Use oil and firm pressure on your stone to grind<sup>1</sup> away shoulder that is in the way of a great edge.

Picture one (to right) shows a massively blunt knife, no edge, all shoulder. Remove those two shoulders – on each side of knife - with

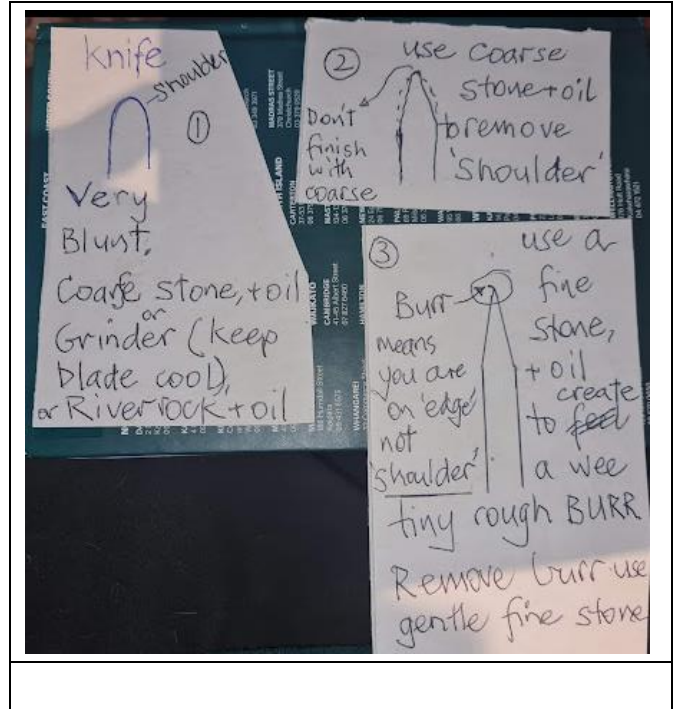
Eg

- a grinder,
- a coarse flat purchased stone,
- even a carefully chosen river stone that is smooth – but coarse grained – greywacke. (Finish with a white quartz stone – fine grained).
- Those stones can be dipped in water or use oil. Pretty well any oil, but a good oil is mix of kerosene and oil – 50:50 ish. Most folk use oil – it helps to keep everything from thinking about rusting.

As you get closer to the true edge (the sharp point/edge where a knife does all the good cutting work) – you are feeling with a finger or thumb for a rough burr.

I will have a knife and a pair of secateurs – with a burr I worked to create.

**That burr tells you that your hard work of removing the shoulder is done, now just gently remove burr with finest stone you have – a steel will also be useful now – for the butchers knife... even the grafting knife.**



Feel for burr across the blade... of knife, or chisel.

<sup>1</sup> If you are going to grind on a fast spinning grinding stone – that's a heap of other skill, safety... and keep edge cool with frequent dips into water. We can do that job of grinding with river stones, coarse stones purchased at ITM etc.

## Sharpening your loppers, secateurs, (chisels) and grafting knife

These all have a one sided approach to sharpening.

(Left handed folk with use a left handed grafting knife. Look at the knife in the picture – to turn it into a grafting knife, grind the top surface, leave bottom against wood – flat. This picture is for right handed folk.

Chisels are sharpened one side only. The flat side is just rubbed with a fine stone – flat. Secateurs work much the same, but you have a wide blade and that blade passes by a base 'blade'. Each is sharpened with different techniques.

Unscrew and do the job properly!

I sharpen till I just feel that burr thing... but I keep the blade strong by working a steeper angle between stone and blade – approx. 30 Deg?

So, if the blades need a lot of work to remove shoulder – use a coarse stone, but it will need to be curved for the bottom blade.

The main cutting blade of loppers/secateurs is best sharpened on a flat, bought stone. No problem using a coarse then fine diamond cutting pad/steel.

I use oil on traditional kind of flat stone, more pressure at start of process and a round and round motion – trying to work all over the surface of my purchased stone. Best demonstrated. I feel for a burr. Stop, switch to light touch with a fine stone, then rub the burr out on the flat stone. Job done!



Right handed grafting knife will be ground on top of blade, left flat underneath, against grafting wood (– or in this case a file handle... ooops)



I reckon a good job of sharpening, cleaning oiling requires a dismantle. Its easy. Bring your bold self to the task!



I use a chainsaw file, facing down to sharpen up the edge of the lower blade. Best demonstrated. I finish up sharpening this blade with a rough stone from river to match the curve, then finally a smoother quartz stone.

That bottom jaw never feels sharp. Remember that edge is close to a right angle... not at all like a knife edge or the top blade.



Larger piece of quartz – would be safer on hands. Approx 30 deg to the face of rock for a strong/robust edge.

Hold flatter 15-20 deg for the grafting knife – where sharpness is crucial and cutting tasks are 'gentle'.

Both halves of loppers/secateurs get a rub on their flat to remove any burr that would stop the two blades sliding past each other. Oil the centre bolt, maybe the spring, and then put them together closed and open shut carefully. Why – that's best explained via sheep shear story. Ask, pls.