

Managing Your Load with Wheelbarrows and Garden Carts

by Rita Pelczar

NOBEL PEACE PRIZE winner and former Polish president Lech Walesa once admitted to being lazy. “But,” he said, “it’s the lazy people who invented the wheel and the bicycle because they didn’t like walking or carrying things.” It probably wasn’t long after the wheel’s invention that savvy gardeners understood its applications in the garden.

Wheelbarrows and garden carts are two simple machines combined: a wheel (or two) and a pair of levers (handles) whose fulcrum is the wheel itself. A bed or bucket holds the load and a stand supports it while at rest. Altogether, these components provide the ability to transport far more weight over greater distances than otherwise possible, since the wheel assumes a significant share of the load.

Positioning a load directly over the wheel axle offers the best combination of load lightening and control; too far forward, the load is more difficult to control, and too far back and it’s harder to lift.

While all wheelbarrows and carts are designed to transport loads, not all loads are equal. Some styles suit certain tasks—and certain gardeners—better than others. Among the most obvious differences are: size, number, and type of wheel; size and material of the bed or bucket; and style and length of the handles. Some carts and wheelbarrows offer additional features that suit specific tasks or needs.

When selecting a wheelbarrow or garden cart, think about what you will be hauling and over what kind of terrain. Consider how easy it is for you to lift and move a full load, how stable it is on the surfaces upon which you are likely to travel, whether it can maneuver through the spaces where you will need it, and how well it will hold up to rough use.

WHEELS: ONE, TWO, OR FOUR

The distinction between wheelbarrows and garden carts can be a bit blurry, but in general wheelbarrows have a single wheel and



Jeep’s wheelbarrow features flat-rib tires that eliminate the need to periodically inflate them.

garden carts usually have two. Some wheelbarrows, like Jeep’s “dualie” models, actually have two wheels providing added stability. They are spaced fairly close together, under the bed. Some carts have four wheels—similar to a wagon.

The wheelbarrow’s single wheel has the advantage of maneuverability: it can travel over very narrow spaces. For example, if you need to ford a creek or cross a ditch with your load, all you need is a plank of wood to span the distance and some balance. The multi-wheeled garden cart, on the other hand, is more stable; it’s less likely to tip over, even if the load is unevenly distributed. But a cart requires wider pathways.

Typically, the tires of both wheelbarrows and carts are inflatable, and keeping them properly inflated will enable you to use either piece of equipment more efficiently. “Most homeowners never bother to fully inflate their tires so they end

up with a wheelbarrow that wobbles, particularly when heavy loads are carried,” says Curt Feick, director of marketing for Jeep Wheelbarrows. Jeep has developed a practical alternative to the inflatable tire—a sturdy flat rib tire that is guaranteed to be flat-free for life.

The tires of some carts, like the DollyCart™ and Vermont Garden Carts, are mounted on heavy-duty, wire-spoked wheels, which are particularly easy to maneuver uphill or over rough terrain, and they take a lot of the strain out of hauling heavy loads such as firewood or soil.

BEDS OR BUCKETS

Usually constructed of steel, which is very durable but heavy, or rugged polyethylene, which is lighter, beds or buckets can also be made of aluminum, wood, nylon, or canvas. They vary in capacity with respect to both volume and weight. If leaves will be your main load, volume is important, but if you plan to haul rocks and soil, weight capacity is a more significant issue. For harvesting vegetables, smaller buckets fit more easily between rows than wide bed carts.

The soft but strong canvas bucket of the Low Rider Cart from Lee Valley Tools lowers directly to the ground for easy loading and is particularly handy for collecting leaves and grass clippings that can be raked right into the bucket. It is ergonomically designed to reduce strain on the lower back and shoulders and can carry up to 350 pounds.

If your storage space is at a premium, consider a folding cart. Most of these have soft, collapsible beds: the Low Rider Cart

Sources

DR® Power Equipment, Vergennes, VT. (800) 687-6575. www.drpower.com.

Jeep Wheelbarrows, Port Chester, NY. (914) 934-9833. www.jeepwheelbarrows.com.

Lee Valley Tools, Ltd., Ogdensburg, NY. (800) 871-8158. www.leevalley.com.

The Original Wheelbarrow Screener, Rome, OH. www.originalwheelbarrow-screener.com.

Plow & Hearth, Inc., Madison, VA. (800) 494-7544. www.plowhearth.com.

Rittenhouse, Inc., St. Catharines, ON, Canada, (877) 488-1914. www.rittenhouse.ca.

Yardiac, Greenville, SC. (864) 288-1661. www.yardiac.com.



Rittenhouse's cart folds flat for easy storage.

and WheelEasy beds are heavy canvas, others are nylon. The Folding Utility Cart from Rittenhouse has a rectangular aluminum bed that folds nearly flat.

FEATURES AND ACCESSORIES

Some wheelbarrows and carts have additional features, and there are a few nifty accessories available that compound their utility. The DollyCart™ from Plow and Hearth converts from a garden cart to a dolly by flipping the handle, folding in the legs, and removing the tailgate. It has an optional tow bar so you can attach it to a tractor for use as a small trailer.

For increased control when carrying heavy loads downhill or unloading on a slope, Jeep makes wheelbarrows with patented disc brakes. The hand-operated brake levers are ergonomically designed. And if physical strength is your weakness, you might want to try DR® Power Equipment's NEUTON™ Garden Cart. Electrically

powered and self-propelled, it is equipped with a rechargeable 12-volt battery.

The Wheelbarrow Screener from Yardiac is a handy device. Constructed of steel mesh surrounded by a heavy-duty plastic frame, it fits atop most wheelbarrows so you can sift rough soil or compost into the bucket as roots, twigs, and other debris are left behind.

The sifted soil or compost in the bucket is ready for delivery to your beds.

A good wheelbarrow or garden cart eases the strain on your back and helps



Reconfiguring the handle and a side slat, the DollyCart from Plow and Hearth, shown here as a dolly, converts into a cart.

get arduous gardening chores done with a lot less effort, leaving you more energy to enjoy your garden.

Rita Pelczar is contributing editor for The American Gardener.

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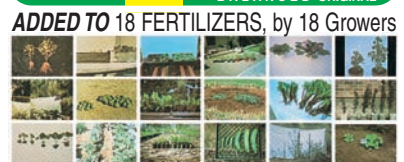
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③ BARE ROOTS	And	
④ FLOWERING	And TO GET MORE FLOWERS, LONGER and MORE BEAUTIFUL	
⑤ SEEDLINGS	TO PLANT THEM ALL SAFELY, UNIFORMLY – and GROWING MORE STRONGLY	
⑥ TREES	TO GET "TWO YEARS' GROWTH IN ONE"?	
⑦ FRUITING	For EARLIER, HEAVIER, BEARING?	
⑧ BULBS	TO START THEM VIGOROUSLY, Beating Soil-rot, Hastening Better BLOOMING	
⑨ SEEDS	To Help GERMINATION Percentage and SPEED EARLIER, BETTER YIELDS, including Vegetables	
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