

# Diggers improved

Rain or shine, a small statue of a hooded man stands sentinel over my garden, reminding me of the billions of gardeners who have shared vegetables, herbs, and flowers with others.

changed very little in the ensuing 1500 years, the tools we take for granted have. Especially in the past century, when in the early 1900s a man named Frederick Taylor, a pioneer in the study of time and motion management, took a simple shovel and created several, er, ground-breaking variations which dramatically improved workers' efficiency and production, and saved their aching backs.



**FELDER RUSHING**

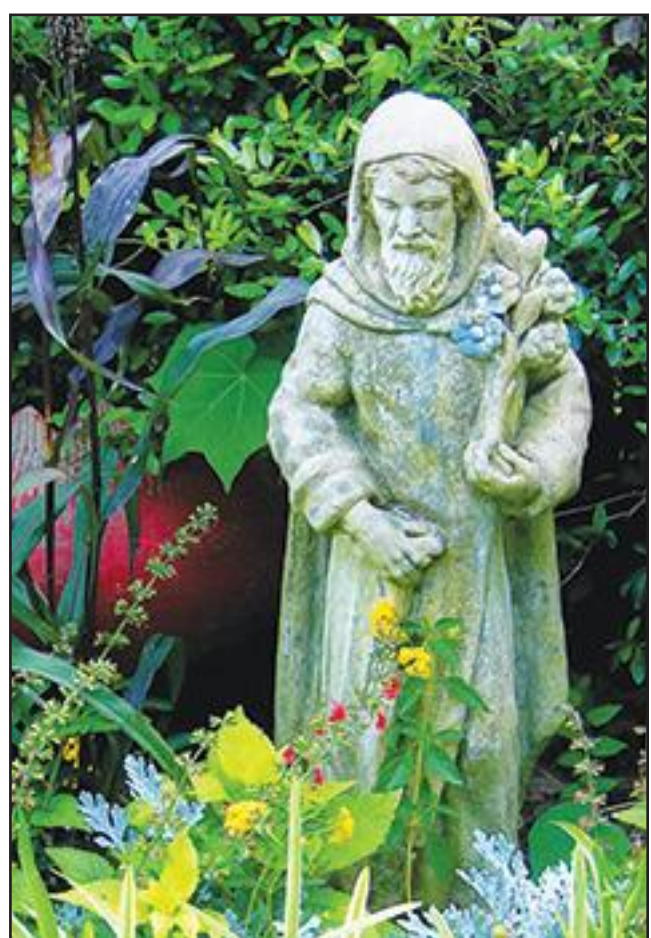
Though I'm not Catholic, I cherish my iconic St. Fiacre, patron saint of gardeners and florists, as an accent in my garden which portrays him, fittingly, holding a sheaf of flowers over one shoulder and a spade in his other hand.

Until then most shovels were simple one-size-fits-all broad wooden or metal blades attached to medium-length handles, similar to what Chinese workers had been using for over 3000 years.

When Fiacre, an Irish priest who settled in France in the 7th century, was granted as much land for his garden as he could plow in one day, he used his wife and the simplest tool of all, his walking staff, to get the most by digging a trench all the way around a huge area.

But Taylor designed specialized shovels to fit various digging and scooping jobs, and proved that workers with custom shovels got nearly four times as much

accomplished in the same example, while the old large time, with less effort. For shovel blade could move



**FELDER'S FIACRE**

more material in a single stroke, it wore men out; his smaller blade was easier and faster to use.

He showed how flat tipped-blades are best for scooping or moving loose materials like dirt piles, gravel, and snow; pointed tips work best for cutting into compacted or rocky soils; and curved tips dig better into softer soil. Taylor's innovative bent shafts quickly became the shovel's first ergonomic design. Not stopping there, he added a strong collar shaft to the blade for replaceable handles to fit into, and rolled the shoulder of the blade as a kick plate for putting your foot on for added power.

Going even farther, he curved the collar shaft a bit to make cranking or pulling the handle towards the worker easier, and bent the blade of scooping shovels upwards a bit so stuff wouldn't slide off when lifted.

So what started out as prehistoric gardeners saving their fingernails by using shoulder blades from big animals to dig and scoop dirt, now has a shaft, with or without a handle, a blade

that can wide or narrow, flat or scooped, with a tip that is pointed, rounded, or straight, with or without an upward lift, plus a kick plate and a sturdy straight or curved shaft.

And now savvy gardeners accept the need for more than one shovel; to dig new ground, cut roots, or edge beds we use a sharp, flat spade with a straight handle, but to scoop and move loose material we grab one with a wider cupped blade, square edge and curved handle.

Even hand trowels have these parts, plus finger grips. And I'm not even getting into turning or tossing forks, rakes, or the myriad variations on hoes for scraping weeds. Or a metal file for keeping sharp tools sharp.

A lot has changed since Fiacre dug his garden with a stick. Now our best tools, for we are the only moving parts, make us more efficient...with fewer aches.

Felder Rushing is a Mississippi author, columnist, and host of the "Gestalt Gardener" on MPB Think Radio. Email gardening questions to [rushingfelder@yahoo.com](mailto:rushingfelder@yahoo.com).

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