

Frequently Asked Questions: The Valley Oak Wheel Hoe

Q: What sets the Valley Oak Wheel Hoe apart from others on the market?

A: In our opinion, several characteristics make Valley Oak preferable to other wheel hoes. These include its easy adjustability; light weight; ease of operation; and the fact that inventor David Grau continues to perfect the hoe based on customer input and experience; even though the wheel hoe has been around for 20 years, it continues to evolve. Recently, for example, Valley Oak redesigned the handle at the flattened section to make it twice as thick, stiffer and stronger; a patent is now pending on this invention. The span between handles has also been reduced from 20" to 16", which will fit most users better – especially women!

Q: What is the best way to operate the wheel hoe?

A: For light weeding in loose soil, the operator may be able to walk along steadily, keeping the blade ½" to 1" below the soil surface. In heavier soils or with larger weeds, a step-stroke, step-stroke motion may be required (this is what we call a "stop-start" or "push-pull" motion on our demonstration video). The best time to hoe your weeds is when they are very small -- the size of alfalfa sprouts, and barely visible. The oscillating action of the blade can be used to throw free any weeds that are clogging the blade without having to stoop down and do it by hand. A quick back-stroke (the "pull" in our "push-pull" motion) under a pile of dislodged weeds will cut the weeds under the pile.

The standard blade assembly of the wheel hoe is not intended to replace a rotary tiller or sod cutter for breaking up compacted soils. In fact, digging deep into tight ground or cutting sod could bend the blade shank. If this happens, put the blade in a vise and straighten it with a larger hammer. The 4-tine cultivator attachment, on the other hand, is useful in breaking up soil. (See below).

Q: How do I decide which size blade to order?

A: The 8" blade is the standard recommended width, and in most cases we suggest it as the blade you order with your wheel hoe. (It's the size we use in our shale-y / rocky Pennsylvania soil.) A 5" blade is appropriate if your rows are spaced close together or you have other narrow spaces in which to hoe. As to the wider blades: Whether they make sense for you depends on the type of soil you have. For soils in good tilth -- nice sandy loams, for example – a wider blade should work great and can save you both time and labor. Most customers who get larger blades choose blade assemblies in the 10" to 14" range. If you would like to have more than one blade size, you can order additional blade assemblies to use with your hoe.

Q: Steel wheel or pneumatic tire?

A: The pneumatic tire is lighter and quieter over gravel than the steel wheel and is considered best for clay soils. It requires additional care and maintenance, however – keeping it out of the sun & rain when not in use, periodically adding air, and possibly repairing punctures. The steel wheel, on the other hand, is comparatively maintenance-free. It has a stainless steel bolt for an axle and two oil-impregnated bronze bushings for bearings that will self-lubricate; sturdier than the pneumatic tire, the steel wheel should last for a long, long time. And though it weighs about 2½ pounds more than the pneumatic tire, that still brings the weight of the hoe to only a very manageable 16 pounds. We chose the steel wheel ourselves and are very happy with our decision.

Q: How easy is it to assemble the wheel hoe?

A: Assembling the hoe is relatively straightforward; it took us well under an hour. If you have any problems, give us a call! (610 844 5232)

Q: What is the optimum adjustment for the handle height?

A: In general, handles should be adjusted so that the middle of the handle grips is at hip level. In part, this is a matter of personal preference. For women, who typically use more lower-body than upper-body strength to push, setting the handles slightly lower than hip level may be preferable. One of the beauties of this wheel hoe is that handle

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height can be adjusted quickly and easily with no tools required; people of significantly different heights can use the same hoe equally effectively.

Q: The tool bar on the wheel hoe has 2 sets of holes; which set should I use for attaching implements?

A: The two sets are there for versatility and personal preference. Using the rear holes on the tool bar (the ones closest to the user, thereby setting the blade further back) and the front holes on the blade assembly works best for many users – but again, this is a matter of personal preference.

Because of the two sets of holes, it is possible to simultaneously use both the 8” blade assembly and the 4-tine cultivator behind it. This can be especially useful in muddier / wetter conditions; the blade slices through the weeds and the tines help to break up the weed / soil connection. California farmer Hazel Van’Evera says she likes to use both implements at the same time because it allows her to keep the soil loose and more easily sift out the weeds cut off by the blade. (She also says she no longer uses a rototiller – only the wheel hoe – to work existing fields.) Simultaneously using both implements requires lowering the blade. To do this, remove the pin from the quick changer to detach the blade assembly from the wheel hoe. Then remove the nuts and bolts attaching the quick changer to the blade assembly. Flip over the quick changer and re-bolt; the pin used to attach the blade to the wheel hoe will now be on top of instead of underneath the top bar of the blade assembly. Making this change allows for proper depth of the blade when used in combination with the tines; if you didn’t do this, the tines would dig too deeply relative to the blade.

Q: What are potential uses for the optional furrower attachment?

A: The furrower makes a nice small furrow, ideal for planting garlic or potatoes and also useful for creating an irrigation furrow. The furrower can also be used to mix compost and other amendments into the top 6 inches of soil prior to planting.

Q: What about the 3- or 4-tine cultivator?

A: We recommend the 4-tine, which is what we use. The price difference is negligible, and the extra tine is well worth it. According to David, in moist soils the 4-tine cultivator in combination with sufficient muscle power will break open most soils to a depth of 4” to 5”.

Q: What kind of warranty comes with the wheel hoe?

A: All wheel hoes and accessories have a one-year money-back guarantee.

Q: How does the wheel hoe ship?

A: The wheel hoe ships to you direct from Valley Oak Tools in Chico, CA, via Fed Ex ground. If you order on our website (www.greenherontools.com), the appropriate shipping charge will be calculated and added to your order.

Q: How much does the wheel hoe cost?

A: Wheel hoes with 5-8” blades cost \$270; those with 10-18” blades cost \$275. Prices for attachments are: furrower -- \$55; 4-tine cultivator -- \$75; 3-tine cultivator -- \$70. Prices do not include shipping. Check our website or call us for prices for additional blade assemblies or replacement blades.

Q: How do I place an order?

A: You can order the wheel hoe on line at http://greenherontools.com/wheel_hoe.htm, or call our customer service line at (610) 844-5232.