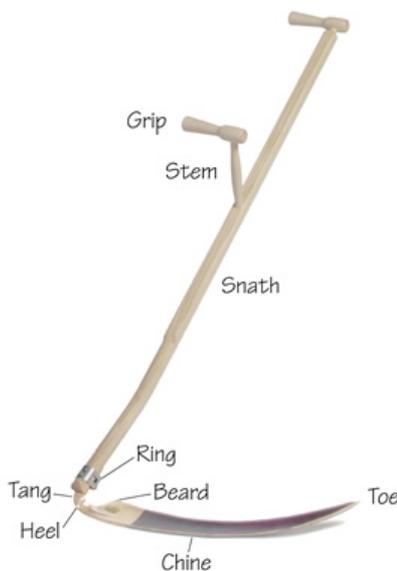


## Using and Maintaining your Scythe

Start slow and first get a feel for the cutting action of the blade. Keep the blade *flat* on the ground at all times, and slide it forward in an arc in front of you, in the direction that the tip is pointing. Start with *short* strokes, until you get a feel for the cutting action, (which is more of a shearing action.

There's no slashing involved!) You only cut a narrow strip of grass with each stroke. When you have a feel for that, you can start to lengthen your stroke. Eventually you can lengthen your stroke to a full 180 degree arc in front of you to deposit the grass without bringing it back with you on the return stroke (a) make sure the scythe returns taking the same path it used when it went forward; and (b) if necessary, give a tiny little flick at the end of the stroke.



## Sharpening the Blade

You will need two stones: a coarse stone which is used only occasionally for improving or maintaining the profile of the bevel and repairing the blade; and a fine natural stone, for touching up the edge in the field.



- The bevel is on the uppermost side of the blade, so that the blade bites downwards into the stem of the grass, (rather than upwards which would give the grass more of an opportunity to bend away from the blade).
- The bevel on the upper side of the blade is very slightly greater than the angle created when your curved scythe stone rubs both against the sharp edge and the back rib of the blade. In other words if the end of your stone is rattling against the rib when you sharpen, this is OK, and means you have almost the right angle and are merely inflicting very marginal wear on your stone.
- The underside of the blade is basically flat (though rounded), and the object is to remove the burr created when you sharpened the top side.
- Strokes should be outward, with the stone moving in the direction in which the blade cuts. Strokes should start at the handle end of the blade and progress towards the tip.
- The most normal stance for sharpening is to hold the scythe upside down, with the top of the snath on the ground and the blade pointing outward and away from you towards the right, at an angle of about 45 degrees when viewed from above.

When you are mowing grass you will need to touch your blade up every 5 to 10 minutes or so with the fine stone. After prolonged use you will find that the blade just doesn't cut as well as it did no matter how much you use the sharpening stone. This is a sign that the edge needs to be restored with *Peening*.

## Peening

Peening involves hammering out the edge of the scythe to make it thinner. Austrian scythe blades are wedge shaped in section. This means that as you continually sharpen and eat away the edge, you get into thicker and thicker metal – the 'edge' of the blade is lost.

### 1) Hammer and Anvil

Traditionally peening is done with a hammer and a tiny anvil. The peening process takes advantage of the malleable nature of metal. Hammering the cutting zone draws the metal out, thinning it for easier sharpening. This beating also work-hardens the metal and enhances edge retention.



- The anvil must be mounted on a vice or lump of wood
- The hammer is used to redistribute the metal ever so slightly.
- The cutting zone is drawn over the crown of the anvil gradually as the hammer strikes the metal. Coordinate the blade movement with the frequency of hammer blows. Try to keep the edge flat on the anvil crown. Set an easy sustainable rhythm and work the blade from the beard to the tip. Examine the results, and start over again. With good light you should be able to see the results of each hammer blow during the process. The metal will seem to expand forward and become thinner. As your edge approaches final thinness lighten the force of the hammer. Continue peening the blade's length as evenly as possible.
- When is the blade finished? - Press your thumbnail on the underside of the cutting edge and slide it along (carefully), you should notice a barely perceptible wave as the edge deforms. At this point the edge is about the thickness of paper. If the blade has begun to crack or fissure you have over peened - very light corrective taps can mend slight problems.

### 2) Peening Jig

Devised to make the art of peening more accessible to the beginner.

- The jig is mounted into a pre-drilled block of wood.
- The blade's edge is placed on the flat of the jig lightly touching the post
- The red cap 1 is put over the post and the blade is worked uniformly with a hammer making a primary bevel.
- The yellow cap 2 is then used for the finishing bevel

The caps are struck repeatedly with a hammer as the blade is drawn through the jig producing a line of blows near the blade edge that draws out and thins the metal. The process is repeated with the second cap, which is shaped so as to create a line of peening closer to the blade edge than the first.

The jig is relatively easy to use and requires less accuracy than freehand peening. It produces good results for most circumstances, and can produce excellent results with practice.



### Points to note

- Much nicer and satisfying way of cutting grass and other vegetation
- Good exercise
- No petrol fumes or noise
- You will get better with practise.
- The blade is sharp – use and store with care
- Remember that most of a blades final sharpness is the result of good hammering, the whetstone only finishes an already sharp edge