



Horticultural Therapy Association of Victoria

Gardening Safety

Gardening is a relaxing and enjoyable form of exercise, but it can pose health risks. If you minimise the risks so you can enjoy the benefits of your garden in good health – without the need for medical support!

About one in every five do-it-yourself (DIY) injuries occurs during gardening. Ignoring safety precautions and using the wrong tool for the job are common causes of gardening injuries.

Be sunsmart

Ultraviolet radiation from the sun can start to burn unprotected skin within minutes. Suggestions include:

- Garden in the early morning or late afternoon. Avoid the hottest part of the day, which is about 10am to 2pm (11am to 3pm during daylight savings time).
- Wear a long-sleeved shirt, long trousers and a broad-brimmed hat.
- Apply broad-spectrum SPF 30+ sunscreen to unprotected skin, and reapply regularly.
- Ultraviolet radiation may cause temporary blindness and an increased risk of cataracts. Wear wraparound sunglasses that meet the Australian Standard AS 1067.

Lawn mower safety

Common lawn mower injuries include open wounds and bone fractures involving the hands and feet. Eye injuries account for 12 per cent of lawn mower injuries, and are caused by the mower blades flicking up debris such as sticks and stones. Suggestions include:

- Wear enclosed shoes when mowing the lawn, preferably safety boots with steel toecaps.
- Wear appropriate eye protection, such as safety goggles.
- Wear long trousers, preferably made from a heavy fabric such as denim, to protect your legs against flying debris.
- Ride-on mowers can tip. Drive at slow speeds, especially when turning.

General gardening equipment safety - Suggestions include:

- Buy gardening equipment with safety devices.
- Comply with the manufacturer's instructions on proper use of the equipment.
- Don't tamper with or remove safety guards or safety devices from equipment.
- Check your equipment regularly to ensure it's in good working order.
- Clean your equipment regularly.
- Wear safety goggles when you use Line trimmers (like Whippersnippers) – they are a common cause of gardening-related eye injuries.
- Be aware of electrical leads when using hedgetrimmer / whippersnippers etc so not to sever.
- Don't stand on the highest rungs of a ladder because there's a high risk of tipping. Falling from a ladder can result in fractures, dislocations and soft tissue injuries.
- Wear earmuffs or plugs when using noisy equipment such as lawn mowers, trimmers and chain saws.
- Use the right tool for the task.

Don't overdo it

Gardening can cause back pain and overuse injuries. Suggestions include:

- Avoid marathon gardening sessions.
- Warm up before gardening with slow, sustained stretches and remember to do basic back stretches during your gardening.
- Rotate your tasks to avoid repetitive movements, for example, after 15 minutes of raking, swap to pruning for a while.
- Rest frequently and relax in the shade with a long drink of water.
- Avoid uncomfortable positions.

Hand safety

Many gardening injuries involve the hands and fingers. Suggestions include:

- Always wear gardening gloves to protect your hands against cuts, soil, insect bites and skin irritants. Leather gloves offer protection against puncture injuries from thorns and bites (insect, snake or rodent).
- Use appropriate tools (shovel or hand shovel) instead of your fingers. Buried objects such as tree roots can injure your hand, wrist or arm while digging.
- Consult with your doctor about keeping your tetanus vaccination up-to-date. Cuts and puncture injuries carry a risk of tetanus.
- Avoid buying or using hand tools that feature 'moulded' handles. Blisters, calluses and muscle pain can occur if the finger grips on the handle are too small or too large for your hand.
- Keep your hand and wrist in a straight line when you use hand tools. Bending the wrist weakens your grip on the tool, which causes you to exert hand and arm muscles with greater force. This can cause fatigue and soft tissue injury.
- Use rubber gloves when working with garden chemicals. Always inspect the rubber gloves for holes/ tears before use.

Potting mix precautions

Legionnaire's disease is caused by the *Legionella* bacterium. It is possible to contract the disease from potting mix. Suggestions include:

- Read the manufacturer's instructions printed on the bag before you use the mix.
- Be careful not to inhale airborne particles. Wear a paper mask that fits over your nose and mouth. Open the bag slowly. Poke the garden hose into the opening and wet the mix to reduce the risk of airborne particles.
- Always wear gloves when handling potting mix. Rinse gloves afterwards.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using potting mix.
- Store potting mix securely away from children.

Keep children safe

Many gardening injuries involve children, particularly in the under-five age group. Suggestions include:

- Keep children well clear while you are operating equipment such as lawn mowers or lawn trimmers.
- Teach children about the potential hazards and keep them away when you mow the lawn. Burns account for 11 per cent of lawn mowing injuries. Most victims are curious preschoolers who touch hot equipment parts.
- Don't permit young children to operate garden machinery, such as lawn mowers.
- Don't allow children to operate or sit pillion on a ride-on mower.
- Store garden chemicals such as fungicides on high shelves behind locked doors.

Where to get help

- Garden supply centres
- Gardening equipment manufacturers
- Your doctor
- Always call an ambulance in an emergency Tel. 000

For further information contact –
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