

Safety in the Garden

By Kathy Wolfe
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Reviewing the basics for a healthy garden experience

It's time to talk about safety in the garden. Yes, gardening does come with its own set of hazards and it is helpful to do a periodic review of our yards, tools and gardening habits to avoid injuries to ourselves, our family and our visitors.

What to wear

Let's start with gardening attire, the first defense against insects, chemicals and excessive sun exposure. While long-sleeved shirts and pants provide the best bodily protection, these clothes may not be practical when temperatures rise to summer levels. Wear sunscreen and a wide brimmed hat, as well as insect repellent if needed, to protect your skin and eyes from exposure. Sunglasses will also be useful. Close-toed shoes or boots are a good option to protect feet. Safety goggles and masks should be worn when spraying chemicals and earplugs will protect your hearing when using motorized equipment such as blowers, chippers and lawn mowers. Wear gloves to protect your hands from blisters, pesticides, bacteria and sharp tools.

Safety measures

Are you current with your tetanus shot? Tetanus, commonly called lockjaw, lives in the soil and can easily enter your body from a cut, nick or puncture. Doctors recommend getting a tetanus shot every ten years.

Warm up your muscles with basic stretching exercises to ease your body into the work day. Avoid prolonged repetitive movements like digging, raking, trimming, pruning and planting by taking breaks or switching tasks periodically so you won't overstress tendons and muscles.

Have water handy and keep yourself hydrated, especially during summer months and while doing strenuous work.

Kneeling puts less stress on your back than bending over so consider wearing knee pads or using a kneeler when weeding and harvesting. Speaking of backs, lift heavy objects using your legs, not your back, and carry the object close to your body to avoid strains.

Equipment safety

Use the correct tools for the job and be sure they are sharpened. If using electrical equipment such as hedge trimmers or mowers, make sure your extension cord is the correct size and is

always behind you. Don't use electric equipment while on moist ground or in the rain and make sure your outlet plug has ground fault interrupters.



Store tools where they won't fall on someone. Keep your tools clean, organized and if necessary, sharpened. *Photo by Nancy Crowell / WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardener.*

When using power equipment such as leaf blowers or trimmers, protect your legs, ears and eyes and wear slip resistant shoes.

Store tools where they won't fall on someone. When laying tools down outside, make sure the sharp sides face down so someone stepping on them does not get cut or the handle won't spring up to hit them in the head. Don't leave tools around that can be tripped over. Keep thresholds such as the greenhouse doorway or any walkway free from a maze of hoses and other garden paraphernalia.

Use safety toppers, bright markers or tape on garden canes and stakes. As our mothers warned us, "You only have two eyes."

Check that ladders are in good repair. Make sure they are set on level ground and don't step too high on them. Learn how to safely use an orchard ladder and where it is appropriate to use it. Be sure it is well set in the ground and do not lean too far out on either side to maintain stability.

Check that your mower has a safety shield and remove rocks and debris from the lawn area that can get thrown by the mower blades. Turn off the mowing function and lift the blade when

crossing gravel driveways. Keep children away while mowing. If using a push mower, mow across slopes and never pull the mower toward yourself. On a riding mower, don't go on steep slopes and watch carefully when backing.

Secure all chemicals and fertilizers away from children.

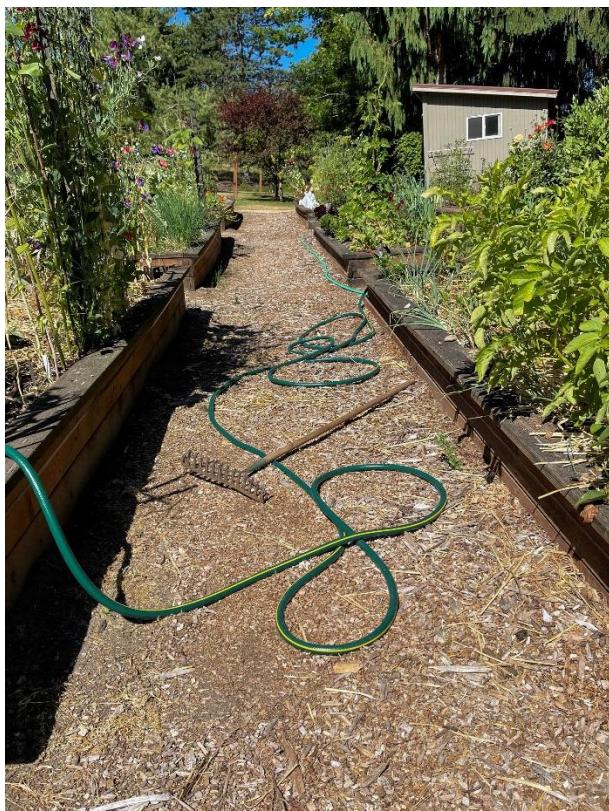
The yard

Check your yard for loose or hanging branches that might fall and injure someone. Trim up long hanging branches that could conk unsuspecting tall people or the person mowing the yard.

Test steps to make sure they are secure and consider handrails if needed. Fill in depressions in paths and the lawn that can trip up visitors unaware.

Remove poison ivy, poison oak and other poisonous plants. Scout your yard for nests of yellow jackets or wasps, especially later in the season when they are most aggressive. They may live in trees or in the ground but avoid walking where you could be stung.

Cut back thorny shrubs next to a path that may obstruct the walkway.



Leave walkways free from obstacles like hoses and garden tools. *Photo by Nancy Crowell / WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardener.*

Emergency planning

Carry a phone with you, especially if you are working alone. A sudden slip or fall can disable you from reaching help quickly. In the event of a serious injury, you can call 911.

Have a first aid kit easily accessible. You don't want to be running all over the house with a bloody cut looking for supplies should an accident happen. The kit should include tweezers, bandages, antiseptic wash, ointment, non-stick gauze pads and tape, compression pads, anti-histamine or an EpiPen if needed for bee stings and a small pair of scissors. Having contact phone numbers for your family doctor or local urgent care center might be helpful.

Using common sense and some precautionary measures can ensure a healthy garden experience for all.

RESOURCES:

- “Safety in the Garden”, Dr. Leonard Perry, Assistant Professor, University of Vermont Extension. [Safety in the Garden \(uvm.edu\)](http://Safety in the Garden (uvm.edu))
- “Gardening Hand Tool Safety.” Master Gardening Program, University of California, August 2007. [Microsoft Word - #5 Gardening Hand-Tool Safety.doc \(ucanr.edu\)](http://Microsoft Word - #5 Gardening Hand-Tool Safety.doc (ucanr.edu))
- “9 Tips for Staying Safe in the Garden.” John Egan, Lawn Starter blog site, January 20, 2020. 9 Tips for Staying Safe in the Garden - Lawnstarter
- “9 Safety Tips for Healthy Garden Practices.” Hand to Shoulder Center of Wisconsin, May 23, 2018. [9 Safety Tips for Healthy Gardening Practices \(handtoshoulderwisconsin.com\)](http://9 Safety Tips for Healthy Gardening Practices (handtoshoulderwisconsin.com))
- “Risk Factors: Danger Lurks in the shrubbery.” Back in the Garden with Dulcy: The Best of the Oregonian Garden Writer Dulcy Mahar.” Compiled and Edited by Ted Mahar, April 21, 2011.