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## Gardening safety

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### Summary

- Ignoring safety precautions and using the wrong tool for the job are common causes of gardening injuries.
  - Rotate your gardening tasks to avoid repetitive movements. For example, after 15 minutes of raking, swap to pruning for a while.
  - Always wear gardening gloves to protect your hands against cuts, soil, potting mix, insect bites and skin irritants.
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Gardening is a relaxing and enjoyable form of exercise, but it can pose health risks. If you're careful, you can enjoy the benefits of your garden in good health. Ignoring safety precautions and using the wrong tool for the job are common causes of gardening injuries.

### Be sun smart in the garden

Ultraviolet radiation from the sun can start to burn unprotected skin within minutes. In Victoria, from September to April, check the **SunSmart UV Alert** each day for the daily sun protection times, in the daily newspaper or on your smartphone.

When the UV level is three or above:

- Wear a long-sleeved shirt, long trousers and a broad-brimmed hat.
- Apply broad-spectrum SPF 30+ sunscreen to unprotected skin 20 minutes before going outside, and reapply regularly.
- Wear wraparound sunglasses that meet Australian Standard AS/NZS1067:2003. Ultraviolet radiation may cause temporary blindness and an increased risk of cataracts.
- Garden in the shade.
- Avoid gardening during the hottest part of the day, which is about 10 am to 2 pm (11 am to 3 pm during daylight savings time). Garden in the early morning or late afternoon.

### Lawnmower safety

Common lawnmower injuries include open wounds and bone fractures involving the hands and feet. Eye injuries can also be caused by the mower blades flicking up debris such as sticks and stones.

Safety 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.
- Take extra care when pulling the mower towards you or mowing on slopes, to avoid foot injuries.
- Lawnmowers can also cause burns. Be careful not to touch hot equipment parts.

### Gardening equipment safety

Make sure your gardening equipment is safe.

Safety suggestions include:

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- Use gardening equipment that meets Australian standards.
- Use gardening equipment with safety devices, such as safety guards.
- 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 make sure it's in good working order.
- Clean your equipment regularly.
- Wear safety goggles when you use line trimmers (such as whipper snippers) – they are a common cause of gardening-related eye injuries.
- Be aware of electrical leads (and make sure you don't cut through them) when you use tools such as hedge trimmers, line trimmers and electric mowers.
- Don't stand on the highest rungs of a ladder. There is a high risk of tipping. Falling from a ladder can cause serious injury, fractures, dislocations and soft tissue injuries.
- Wear earmuffs or earplugs when using noisy equipment such as lawnmowers, line trimmers and chainsaws.
- Use the right tool for the task and make sure it is the right sized tool for you.

### **Don't overdo it in the garden**

Gardening can cause back pain and overuse injuries.

Safety suggestions include:

- Avoid long 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 drink of water.
- Avoid uncomfortable positions.
- Bend at the knees and don't strain when lifting heavy objects. If the object is too heavy for you, seek help.

### **Hand safety in the garden**

Many gardening injuries involve the hands and fingers.

Safety 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, spider or rodent).
- Use appropriate tools for digging instead of your fingers (for example, a shovel or hand shovel). Buried objects such as tree roots, glass and metal 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.
- Choose your hand tools to suit you. Avoid buying or using hand tools that feature 'moulded' handles that don't fit your hand. 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 or tears before use.

### **Legionnaires' disease and gardening safety**

Legionnaires' disease is caused by the Legionella bacterium. It is possible to contract the disease from potting mix.

Safety suggestions include:

- Read the manufacturer's instructions printed on the bag before you use the mix, and follow them closely.
- Always wear a mask and gloves when handling soil, compost or potting mix. Rinse gloves afterwards.
- Open bags of potting mix slowly and in a ventilated space. Direct the opening away from the face to avoid inhaling the mix.
- Dampen the mix with a light spray of water to reduce the risk of airborne particles.
- Be careful not to inhale airborne particles. Wear a paper mask that fits over your nose and mouth.
- Water gardens and composts gently, using a low-pressure hose.
- Avoid breathing in droplets of water from dripping pot plants, including hanging baskets, and when watering plants.
- Store potting mix securely, away from children.
- Wash hands carefully with soap and water after handling soil and before eating, drinking, smoking or placing hands near the face or mouth.

### **Child safety in the garden**

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

Safety suggestions include:

- Keep children well clear while you are operating equipment such as lawnmowers or lawn trimmers, and teach them about the potential hazards of such equipment.
- Make sure children do not touch the lawnmower after you have used it, as it will be hot and can cause burns.
- Don't permit young children to operate garden machinery such as lawnmowers.
- Don't allow children to operate or sit on the back of a ride-on mower.
- Do not leave power tools plugged in and unattended.
- Store garden chemicals such as weed killer on high shelves behind locked doors.
- Store gardening tools and equipment safely and securely.
- Secure fences and gates.
- Provide shade, sunhats and sunscreen, and appropriate protective clothing, such as gloves and gumboots.
- Make sure children drink plenty of water, especially during warm weather.
- Do not leave buckets of water unattended around very young children.
- Never leave young children unattended around bodies of water. Make sure pools are securely fenced, and ensure that ponds or other bodies of water have a mesh screen installed just below the surface of the water to protect young children from falling in.

### **Safety in the garden for older people**

Safety tips for older people and their carers include:

- Attend to any cuts, bruises or insect bites immediately.
- Take care in the use of power tools.
- Secure gates and fences if memory loss is an issue.
- Ensure that paths and walkways are flat and non-slip.
- Warm up before gardening and encourage frequent breaks.
- Prevent sun exposure by working in the garden early in the morning or late in the day. Wear a hat and apply sunscreen frequently.
- Drink water or juice, and avoid alcohol.
- Wear protective shoes, lightweight comfortable clothes that cover exposed skin, a hat and gardening gloves.
- Store garden equipment safely.

### **Where to get help**

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**[betterhealth.vic.gov.au](https://betterhealth.vic.gov.au)**

- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
- Your **GP (doctor)**
- Garden supply centres
- Gardening equipment manufacturers

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