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Garden Safety

Updated

June 2011

IT'S YOUR HEALTH

Gardening Safety

THE ISSUE



More Canadians are discovering the pleasures and rewards of gardening, but the activities involved in creating and maintaining a garden are not without some health hazards.

GARDENING

Gardening has become an increasingly popular activity in Canada in recent years. Gardening offers many benefits, including:

- the satisfaction of watching something take root and grow
- an opportunity to enjoy the outdoors and introduce children to the joys of nature
- an enjoyable form of exercise for all ages
- an opportunity to beautify landscapes and improve property values

Although the benefits of gardening outweigh the risks, gardeners still need to be careful when using power tools and equipment and when handling fertilizers and other chemicals, especially when there are small children around.

THE HEALTH RISKS OF GARDENING

There are various health risks related to gardening, ranging from physical overexertion and sunburn to serious injuries from the improper use or maintenance of power equipment.

Power Tools and Equipment

- Injury can happen when a lawnmower slips or overturns on a slope or wet grass, when rocks and debris fly out from underneath, or when clearing clogged blades while a power mower is still running.
- Injuries can be caused by falls from a ride-on lawnmower, often due to more than one person riding on it.
- Electric shock is a potential danger when operating tools with frayed cords or in wet conditions.
- Excessive noise from power garden equipment can gradually cause permanent [hearing loss](#) and the inability to hear warning sounds.



Overexertion

- Repetitive strain injury can result from doing one task for too long.
- Muscle strain, back injuries and blisters can be caused by moving a greater weight than your body can handle, bending, and improper use of garden tools.
- Dehydration can occur if you don't take in enough liquid, especially water, when you exert yourself.

Canada

Sun

- Over-exposure to the [sun](#) can cause sunstroke, sunburn and over the long term, skin cancer.



Other Unintentional Injuries

- Bulbs and seeds can be choking hazards for young children.
- Some [plant varieties are toxic](#) to children who may try to eat them.
- Equipment can cause injuries if left lying on the ground.

SAFETY TIPS

To minimize your risk from gardening, follow these safety tips.

Power Tools and Equipment

- Read, understand and follow all of the manufacturer's instructions before using any power tool.
- Keep children out of the mowing area and never let them operate or ride a lawnmower.
- Remove all rocks, sticks, toys and tools from the lawn before mowing.
- Never mow or use electrical equipment in wet conditions.
- If the blades of a power lawnmower become clogged, turn off and/or unplug the machine before clearing it. Use a stick or other tool to remove the clogged debris in case the blades complete a rotation after clearing.
- Always wear proper equipment when using power tools, including leather shoes or work boots, ear protection, gloves and safety glasses.

- Mow across the face of slopes, not up and down. For ride-on lawnmowers, do not mow in areas with a slope of more than 15 degrees, stop or start on a slope, or turn the machine on a slope. Use a slow speed and low gear.
- Before plugging in any power equipment, make sure the power switch is "off".

Overexertion



- Make sure you are in shape before the gardening season begins, and warm up with some slow stretches, holding each for at least 20 seconds.
- Find a comfortable posture for your body and keep your work in front and close to you, to avoid reaching and twisting. Use pads or a padded kneeling stool for work at ground level, and rotate tasks to avoid injuries from repetition.
- Use the right tools for the job.
- Use a wheelbarrow to transport earth and equipment.
- Work within your strength and endurance, pace yourself, and take a break when you're tired. Occupational Health Standards list safe lifting loads as 64 pounds for men and 28 pounds for women.
- Make sure you drink liquids, especially water, when exerting yourself.

Chemicals and Soil Amendments

- Although processed vermiculite, found in some potting soils, is considered safe, use vermiculite outdoors, keep it damp to avoid dust, and do not bring dust into your home on clothing. Premixed potting soils contain less vermiculite than pure vermiculite products and are less likely to generate dust.
- Use peat moss, sawdust, perlite or bark as an alternative to vermiculite when amending the soil.
- Investigate the many ways to control garden pests without using pesticides.
- [Pesticides](#) (including herbicides, insecticides, fungicides and rodenticides) should always be handled with care. If you decide to use a pesticide, look for the Pest Control Product (PCP) registration number on the label and make sure you use a

product registered in Canada. Follow the label directions to avoid possible health concerns.

- To avoid storage problems, buy only as much pesticide product as you need. If you must store pesticides, store them in their original containers with the proper label. Keep them well out of the reach of children and animals.
- Dispose of pesticide containers according to the [Hazardous Waste regulations](#) in your municipality.
- Accidentally swallowing garden chemicals can poison both children and adults.

Sun



- Avoid gardening between peak hours of 11am and 4pm when the [sun is the strongest](#), or garden in the shade during those hours.
- Wear protective clothing: a large-brimmed hat, long sleeves and long pants.
- Wear a broadband [sunscreen](#) with an SPF of at least 15 on all exposed skin.

Unintentional Injuries

- Always safely store all equipment, tools, garden chemicals, seeds and bulbs out of sight and out of reach of young children.
- Keep a close eye on children when they are in the garden. Keep them away from equipment, fertilizers and other chemicals, bulbs and seeds, as well as ponds, which can be a drowning hazard.



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GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S ROLE

Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada work in several ways to protect Canadians from hazards associated with gardening. The *Product Safety Programme* regulates consumer products and promotes awareness of potential product-related hazards. It also assesses and works to reduce health risks from environmental factors like **sun radiation** and **noise** from powered equipment.

Health Canada's *Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA)* is responsible for regulating pesticides in Canada under the *Pest Control Products Act*. Health Canada conducts a rigorous scientific review of all pesticides before they enter the Canadian market to make sure they meet our high standards for human health and environmental protection. Health Canada also develops pest management policies and guidelines, and promotes sustainable pest management practices.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For more on **Gardening Safety**, go to: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/pubs/cons/garden-jardinage-eng.php>
- For information on **how to use pesticides properly**, go to: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/pest/part/protect-proteger/use-utiliser/index-eng.php
- For information on **personal insect repellents**, go to: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/life-vie/insect-eng.php
- For more information on **summer safety** issues, go to: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/alpha-eng.php#s

For more information on Sun Safety visit the following websites:

- Health Canada's website on **Ultraviolet Radiation** at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/radiation/ultraviolet/index_e.html
- Health Canada's **UV Index Sun Awareness Program** at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/sun-sol/uv-prog/index-eng.php
- Health Canada's **Sun Safety** website at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/sun-sol/index-eng.php
- *It's Your Health* – **Sun Safety** articles at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/alpha_e.html#s

Or call the Pest Management Information Service at 1-800-267-6315 (toll free in Canada) e-mail: pmra_infoserv@hc-sc.gc.ca

For safety information about food, health and consumer products, visit the *Healthy Canadians* website at: www.healthycanadians.gc.ca

For additional articles on health and safety issues, go to the *It's Your Health* web section at: www.healthcanada.gc.ca/iyh

You can also call toll free at 1-866-225-0709 or TTY at 1-800-267-1245*

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