

Gardening Safety

Gardening can be a great way to enjoy the outdoors, get physical activity, beautify the community, and grow nutritious fruits and vegetables. Whether you are a beginner or expert gardener, health and safety are always important.

Below are some tips to help keep you safe and healthy so that you can enjoy the beauty and bounty gardening can bring.

Dress to protect.

Gear up to protect yourself from lawn and garden pests, harmful chemicals, sharp or motorized equipment, insects, and harmful rays of too much sun.

- Wear safety goggles, sturdy shoes, and long pants when using lawn mowers and other machinery.
- Protect your hearing when using machinery. If you have to raise your voice to talk to someone who is an arm's length away, the noise can be potentially harmful to your hearing.
- Wear gloves to lower the risk for skin irritations, cuts, and certain contaminants.
- Beware of bugs, snakes, spiders and overwintering animals and protect yourself from diseases caused by mosquitoes and ticks. Use insect repellent containing DEET. Wear long-sleeved shirts, and pants tucked in your socks. You may also want to wear high rubber boots since ticks are usually located close to the ground.
- Lower your risk for sunburn and skin cancer. Wear long sleeves, wide-brimmed hats, sun shades, and sunscreen with sun protective factor (SPF) 15 or higher.

It is now time to seal up, trap up, and clean up to [prevent rodent infestation](#). As you're clearing out clutter, fill any gaps or holes inside and outside your home. Eliminate or seal rodent food sources such as pet food, bird feeders, and garbage cans. Elevate hay, woodpiles, and garbage cans at least 1 foot off the ground, and trim grass and shrubbery within 100 feet of your home.

In the yard, remove any items that may collect standing water, such as buckets, old tires, and toys. Mosquitoes can breed in them in just days. You can reduce the number of ticks around your home by removing leaf litter, brush and woodpiles around your house and at the edge of your yard. By clearing trees and brush in your yard, you can reduce the likelihood that deer, rodents, and ticks will live there. Replace or repair torn window screens to keep bugs out of the house.

Put safety first.

Powered and unpowered tools and equipment can cause serious injury. Limit distractions, use chemicals and equipment properly, and be aware of hazards to lower your risk for injury.

- Follow instructions and warning labels on chemicals and lawn and garden equipment.
- Make sure equipment is working properly.
- Sharpen tools carefully.
- Keep harmful chemicals, tools, and equipment out of children's reach.

Know your limits in the heat.

Even being out for short periods of time in high temperatures can cause serious health problems. Monitor your activities and time in the sun to lower your risk for heat-related illness.

- If you're outside in hot weather for most of the day you'll need to make an effort to drink more fluids.
- Avoid drinking liquids that contain alcohol or large amounts of sugar, especially in the heat. These actually cause you to lose more body fluid.
- Take breaks often. Try to rest in shaded areas so that your body's thermostat will have a chance to recover. Stop working if you experience breathlessness or muscle soreness.
- Pay attention to signs of heat-related illness, including extremely high body temperature, headache, rapid pulse, dizziness, nausea, confusion, or unconsciousness.
- Watch people who are at higher risk for heat-related illness, including infants and children up to four years of age; people 65 years of age or older; people who are overweight; people who push themselves too hard during work or exercise; and people who are physically ill or who take certain medications (i.e. for depression, insomnia, or poor circulation).
- Eat healthy foods to help keep you energized.

Persons with disabilities and physical activity.

Talk to your health care provider if you have physical, mental, or environmental concerns that may impair your ability to work in the garden safely.

- If you have arthritis, use tools that are easy to grasp and that fit your ability. Research shows that 2½ hours per week of moderate physical activity can give you more energy and can help relieve arthritis pain and stiffness.
- If you are taking medications that may make you drowsy or impair your judgment or reaction time, don't operate machinery, climb ladders, or do activities that may increase your risk for injury.

- Listen to your body. Monitor your heart rate, level of fatigue, and physical discomfort.
- Call 911 if you get injured, experience chest and arm pain, dizziness, lightheadedness, or heat-related illness.

Enjoy the benefits of physical activity.

Gardening is an excellent way to get physical activity. Active people are less likely than inactive people to be obese or have high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, heart disease, stroke, depression, colon cancer, and premature death.

- Be active for at least 2½ hours a week. Include activities that raise your breathing and heart rates and that strengthen your muscles. You can burn 150 calories by gardening (standing) for approximately 30-45 minutes. Help kids and teens be active for at least 1 hour a day.
- If you have been inactive, start out with just a few minutes of physical activity each day. Gradually build up time and intensity.
- Vary your gardening activities to keep your interest and to broaden the range of benefits.

Get vaccinated.

Vaccinations can prevent many diseases and save lives. All adults should get a tetanus vaccination every 10 years. Tetanus lives in the soil and enters the body through breaks in the skin. Because gardeners use sharp tools, dig in the dirt, and handle plants with sharp points, they are particularly prone to tetanus infections.

- Before you start gardening this season, make sure your tetanus/diphtheria (Td) vaccination is up to date.
- Ask your health care provider if you need any other vaccinations.