

Spring Safety

There is a lot to be done this time of year. Cold and rainy weather has kept us inside, there is a lot to be done outside and we are itching to get out.

Lawn mower maintenance may not be the first thing that springs to mind when considering home safety tips, but the "US Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates approximately 60,000 lawnmower related accidents happen every year. If you need to be convinced of the importance of lawn mower maintenance, consider all the potentials for mishap. You've got combustible fuel, spinning blades and high RPMs all tied together in one package. Exercising a little lawn mower maintenance can keep you from showing up at the hospital with missing toes or unsightly burns. Of utmost importance is following general gasoline safety guidelines. Don't smoke while you're filling up the tank on your gas powered mower. Don't use your mouth to siphon gas through a garden hose into your lawn mower

The part of your mower that is going to see the most action is the blades. So, the most routine part of your lawn mower maintenance is going to concern caring for the blades. Every time you mow your yard, allow the engine to cool and clean the mulch debris from the blades. Typically, this can be achieved by raising the mower up and spraying the area with a hose. If you have a riding mower, you'll have to maneuver yourself into position underneath the mower. ALWAYS make sure the engine is off if you have to reach near the blades with your fingers. In fact, you can even disconnect the spark plug, just to be sure. In fact, always remove the spark plug when doing any sort of lawn mower maintenance, just for the sake of keeping your fingers.

To prevent dulling, you should periodically have your blades sharpened at a lawn mower maintenance/ repair shop. If you notice anything visibly wrong with the blades, such as missing chunks, bent sections or anything that looks like it might fly off and give you an unwanted haircut, have them replaced. To prevent damage to the blades in the first place, remove all rocks and twigs from your yard before mowing. You might call this preventive lawn mower maintenance. If you keep it from breaking in the first place, you'll save yourself the hassle of fixing it. Additionally, those rocks and twigs easily become missiles, and they have the oddest attraction to eyeballs. So

wear safety glasses while you're mowing. You should also consider wearing hearing protection.

Lastly, don't forget the motor. The same basic care you show your car is applicable to your lawn mower engine. Frequent oil and filter changes will prevent the engine from seizing up. The same goes for spark plugs and air filters. While these may not necessarily seem like home safety tips for dealing with your lawn mower, consider the idea that any rotating device that isn't in good repair is a potential hazard. This holds doubly true for the lawn mower, which places rotating cutting devices in close proximity to your body.

Ladders: Many Spring chores such as maintenance of exterior walls, gutters, tree limb pruning, etc require the use of ladders. According to the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, more than 500,000 people are treated each year for ladder related injuries in the U.S. Of these each year, approximately 300 die from these injuries.

Ladders are tools. Many of the basic safety rules that apply to most tools also apply to the safe use of a ladder:

- Avoid electrical hazards! – Look for overhead power lines before handling any ladder and especially avoid using a metal ladder near power lines or exposed energized electrical equipment.
- Always inspect the ladder prior to using it. Tightening loose metal attachment nuts as necessary will keep the ladder stable. If the ladder is damaged, has missing parts, sways from side to side or is otherwise unstable, discard it.
- If you feel tired or dizzy, or are prone to losing your balance, stay off the ladder, and certainly do not use a ladder if under the influence of alcohol or medications.
- Do not use ladders in high winds or storms or elevate on top of other items such as boxes or buckets to gain additional height.
- Wear clean slip-resistant shoes. Shoes with leather soles are not appropriate for ladder use since they are not considered sufficiently slip-resistant.
- The ladder you select must be the right size for the job
- The Duty Rating of the ladder must be greater than the total weight of the climber, tools, supplies, and other objects placed upon the ladder.

- The length of the ladder must be sufficient so that the climber does not have to stand on the top rung or step.
- When the ladder is set-up for use, it must be placed on firm level ground and without any type of slippery condition present at either the base or top support points.
- Only one person at a time is permitted on a ladder unless the ladder is specifically designed for more than one climber (such as a Trestle Ladder).
- Ladders must not be placed in front of closed doors that can open toward the ladder. The door must be blocked open, locked, or guarded.
- Read the safety information labels on the ladder.
- The on-product safety information is specific to the particular type of ladder on which it appears. The climber is not considered qualified or adequately trained to use the ladder until familiar with this information.
- Never jump or slide down from a ladder or climb more than one rung/step at a time.

The Three Point-of-Contact Climb

When climbing a ladder, it is safest to utilize Three Points-of-Contact because it minimizes the chances of slipping and falling from the ladder. At all times during ascent or descent, the climber must face the ladder and have two hands and one foot, or two feet and one hand in contact with the ladder cleats and/or side rails. In this way, the climber is not likely to become unstable in the event one limb slips during the climb. It is important to note that the climber must not carry any objects in either hand that can interfere with a firm grip on the ladder. Otherwise, Three Points-of-Contact with the ladder cannot be adequately maintained and the chance of falling is increased in the event a hand or foot slip occurs. Factors contributing to falls from ladders include haste, sudden movement, lack of attention, the condition of the ladder (worn or damaged), the user's age or physical condition, or both, and the user's footwear.

Although the user's weight or size typically does not increase the likelihood of a fall, improper climbing posture creates user clumsiness and may cause falls. Reduce your chances of falling during the climb by:

- wearing slip-resistant shoes with heels and heavy soles to prevent foot fatigue;

- cleaning the soles to maximize traction;
- using towlines, a tool belt or an assistant to convey materials so that the climbers hands are free when climbing;
- climbing slowly and deliberately while avoiding sudden movements;
- keeping the center of your belt buckle (stomach) between the ladder side rails (or within the width of the cleats) when climbing and while working. Do not overreach or lean while working so that you don't fall off the ladder sideways.

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.

Grilling: Nothing says summer like the smoky flavor of foods cooked out on the grill. When grilling, use a meat thermometer to make sure that you cook meat and poultry thoroughly. The era of medium-rare hamburgers is over! Ground beef should be cooked to an internal temperature of 160°F in order to kill germs found in raw and undercooked meat. Also, put cooked meat on a clean platter, rather than back on the one that held the raw meat, to avoid cross-contamination. Wash hands, kitchen work surfaces, and utensils with soap and water immediately after they have been in contact with raw meat or poultry. Whether you're cooking out in the backyard or on a picnic, always keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot. When you're finished eating, refrigerate leftovers promptly.