

Well Directions

focus for July 2007

Safe Gardening: For you and the Earth

In this issue...

- ▶ Dress to Protect
- ▶ Put Safety First
- ▶ Watch out for Heat-Related Illness
- ▶ Know your Limitations
- ▶ Tips for a Waste-Free Lawn and Garden
- ▶ Care for your Lawn in an Environmentally Protective Way
- ▶ Enjoy the Benefits of Gardening
- ▶ Smart Selections



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

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, in 2004, about 67,000 consumers nationwide went to emergency rooms because of injuries related to push mowers. About 14,600 suffered injuries related to riding mowers and garden tractors.

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 chemicals, heavy equipment, insects, and the 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 and cuts.
- To protect yourself from diseases caused by mosquitoes and ticks, use insect repellent containing DEET. Wear clothing treated with permethrin, 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.
- Wear long sleeves, wide-brimmed hats, sun shades, and sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher to lower your risk for sun burn and skin cancer.

▶ Put Safety First

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 equipment.
- Make sure equipment is working properly.
- Sharpen tools carefully.
- Keep harmful chemicals, tools, and equipment out of children's reach.

▶ Watch out for Heat-Related Illness

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

- Drink plenty of water throughout the day to replace lost fluids. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink. 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 shady 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.



▶ Know your Limitations

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 moderate physical activity three or more days a week 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 level of fatigue, heart rate, and physical discomfort.
- Call 911 if you experience warning signs of a heart attack (sweating, chest and arm pain, dizziness, and/or lightheadedness) or heat-related illness.



Care for your Lawn in an Environmentally Protective Way

A preventative health care program for your lawn should have the following steps:

1. Develop healthy soil
2. Choose a grass type that thrives in your climate
3. Mow high, often and with sharp blades
4. Water deeply but not too often
5. Correct thatch build up
6. Set realistic goals

▶ Tips for a Waste-Free Lawn and Garden

- Use food scraps, yard trimmings, and other organic waste to create a compost pile. Compost is a rich soil amendment that can help increase water retention, decrease erosion, and replace chemical fertilizers.
 - Many plants and insects can serve as non-toxic, natural deterrents to weeds and garden pests. Introduce ladybugs to eat aphids, plant marigolds to ward off beetles, and look for quick-sprouting plants to block weed growth.
 - Buy recycled-content gardening equipment and tools, such as garden hoses made from old tires, stepping stones made from old glass bottles, or hand tools made with recycled plastic. You can also use plastic lumber made from recycled plastic bottles and bags to make flower beds, trellises, decks, and birdhouses.
 - Recycle used oil and tires from lawn and garden equipment.
 - Reduce your use of fertilizers and pesticides by planting grass and other vegetation that is native to your area.
- Raise the cutting height of your lawn mower during the hot summer months to keep grass roots shaded and cooler, reducing weed growth, browning, and the need for watering. When you mow, "grasscycle" by leaving grass clippings on your lawn instead of bagging them or use a mulching mower. The clippings will return nutrients to the soil instead of taking up space in landfills.
 - Shred untreated wood and leaf wastes into chips and use them as mulch on garden beds to prevent weed growth, retain moisture, regulate soil temperature, and add nutrients back to the soil.
 - Conserve water. Use barrels to collect rain water and use it to water plants. Check hoses for leaks before watering plants, and position sprinklers so they water only plants, not the sidewalk, street, or house. Also remember to water during the cooler parts of the day (early morning is best) to avoid evaporation.

courtesy of: The EPA

▶ Enjoy the Benefits of Gardening

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

- Get at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity most, preferably all, days of the week. You can burn 150 calories by gardening (standing) for approximately 30-45 minutes.
- 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.

courtesy of: Centers for Disease Control

Smart Selections



Gardening & Arthritis

http://ww2.arthritis.org/resources/home_life/gardening.asp

A few simple modifications can help you keep your garden growing with ease if you have arthritis.

Lawn and Garden Equipment

<http://www.epa.gov/otaq/equip-ld.htm>

This Web site provides consumer information, regulation and guidance, compliance fee, and certification data for ten categories of nonroad spark - ignition engines.

Pesticide Information

<http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/controlling/garden.htm>

Provides information about controlling pests in your lawn and garden.

Green Landscaping

<http://www.epa.gov/reg3esd1/garden/index.htm>

Learn how to reduce harm to the environment, save time and money with lower maintenance and have healthier places to work and play.

For more extensive information on these topics and many others, please visit your online Health & Wellness Library.