



## GARDEN 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.

### Background

Perhaps due to the long winters, 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 to introduce children to the joys of nature
- An enjoyable form of exercise for all ages
- An opportunity to beautify your property and improve property values

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

### The Health Risks of Gardening

There are various health risks associated with 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 occur when a lawnmower slips or overturns on a slope or wet grass, from flying rocks and debris, or from clearing clogged blades while a power mower is still running.

- Injuries can be caused by falls from a ride-on lawnmower, possibly 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.
- Gradual permanent hearing loss, inability to hear warning sounds or irritation of others can result from excessive noise of power garden equipment

#### Overexertion

- Repetitive strain injury can occur from doing one task for too long.
- Muscle strain, back injuries, and blisters can result from moving a greater weight than your body can handle, bending, and improper use of garden tools.

#### Chemicals

- Although processed vermiculite is considered safe, some vermiculite ore used in processed vermiculite may contain trace amounts of asbestos. When breathed in sufficient quantities, asbestos fibres can cause asbestosis (a scarring of the lungs that makes breathing difficult), mesothelioma (a rare cancer of the lining of the chest or abdominal cavity) and lung cancer.
- Pesticides (including herbicides, insecticides, fungicides and rodenticides) should always be handled with care according to label instructions to avoid possible health concerns.
- Poisoning can occur when garden chemicals are accidentally ingested, especially by children.



## Sun

- Over-exposure to the sun can cause sunstroke, sunburn and over the long term, skin cancer.

## 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.

## Minimizing Your Risk

To minimize your risk from gardening, follow these 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 allow them to 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 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 workboots, 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 over 15 degrees, do not stop or start on

a slope, do not turn the machine on a slope, and 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 which last for 20 seconds each.
- 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.

### Chemicals

- 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.

- If you decide to use a pesticide, make sure you use a product registered in Canada. Look for the PCP Act number on the label and use the product according to label directions.

- Buy only as much pesticide or herbicide product as you need, to avoid storage problems. If you must store pesticides or herbicides, store them in their original containers that have the proper label. Keep them well out of the reach of children or animals.
- Dispose of pesticide and herbicide containers according to the Hazardous Waste regulations in your municipality.

## 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.

## Government of Canada's Role

Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada have



several areas of responsibility that work to protect Canadians from hazards associated with gardening. The Product Safety Programme regulates consumer products and promotes awareness of potential product-related hazards. They also assess and work to reduce health risks from environmental factors such as sun radiation and noise from powered equipment.

Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) is responsible for regulating pesticides in Canada under the federal Pest Control Products Act. The PMRA conducts a scientific assessment of all pesticides before they enter the Canadian market, to ensure they pose no unacceptable risks. They also develop pest management policies and guidelines, and promote sustainable pest management.

## Need More Info?

For more on Gardening Safety, go to:  
[http://hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/pubs/cons/garden-jardinage\\_e.html](http://hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/pubs/cons/garden-jardinage_e.html)

For more on Sun Safety, go to:  
[http://hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/pubs/sun-sol/safety-prudence\\_e.html](http://hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/pubs/sun-sol/safety-prudence_e.html)

For tips and tricks on responsible pesticide use and maintaining a healthy lawn, go to:  
[www.healthylawns.net](http://www.healthylawns.net)

For information on the proper use of pesticides, go to:  
<http://www.pmra-arla.gc.ca/english/consum/properuse-e.html>

For information on personal insect repellents, go to:  
<http://www.pmra-arla.gc.ca/english/consum/insectrepellents-e.html>

For more information on summer safety issues go to:  
[http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/alpha\\_e.html#s](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/alpha_e.html#s)

For additional articles on health and safety issues go to the It's Your Health Web site at:  
[www.healthcanada.gc.ca/iyh](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/iyh)  
You can also call toll free at 1-866-225-0709  
or TTY at 1-800-267-1245\*