

Occupational Health & Safety

By Russ Grayson, Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network

Reprinted with permission from – Seed to Seed – Food Gardens in Schools – Jude Fanton & Jo Immig

Published by Seedsavers – www.seedsavers.net



Tools

1. Take tools to the garden in receptacles, such as boxes, buckets, baskets or a wheelbarrow so there is a predetermined place to put tools when not in use and at the end of the gardening session.
2. Before using a spade, garden fork, rake or other tool, look to make sure there is nobody behind or beside you that you could hit with the tool.
3. When you have finished using a garden tool or you put a tool aside for a moment, place it out of the way of people.
4. Never lay a tool across a path or place it in long grass where it is hidden and where people could trip over it.
5. Lean a garden rake against something when you put it aside. If you have to lay it down, place it away from where people might walk. Place it with the pointed tangs on the ground, not pointing up.
6. When putting a garden spade, shovel or fork aside, push it into the soil so that it remains upright and visible.
7. Carry tools such as spades, garden forks and rake in your hand rather than over the shoulder. Carried on the shoulder, it is easy to hit someone accidentally with the tool if you turn around and they are close by.



Avoid sunburn and dehydration

1. Wear a hat to avoid sunburn.
2. If you sunburn easily, consider wearing a lightweight shirt with long sleeves and long trousers.
3. Use a sunscreen cream to avoid sunburn on exposed skin.
4. If in the garden for some time, remember to drink water to avoid dehydration.



Care with creatures

1. Do not try to pick up bugs, spiders and other creatures you come across. They might defend themselves by biting, stinging or scratching.
2. Look before lifting buckets, watering cans, boxes and other things. Redback spiders sometimes nest in them and a bite can be dangerous.
3. If gardening near bushland, do not interfere with any snakes or goannas you see in the garden.



Lifting

1. When lifting something heavy, bend your knees and crouch down, then lift it by straightening your legs.
2. To avoid back injury, do not bend over to pick up something that is heavy.



Other precautions

1. If you suffer breathing difficulties or asthma, consider wearing a dust mask when making or turning compost or spreading mulch.
2. Consider wearing gardening gloves to protect your hands and avoid blisters from handling garden tools.
3. Wear enclosed shoes to protect your feet. Do not garden in sandals.



Storage

1. Designate an area of the garden for storing materials.
2. Store materials so that they are unlikely to fall over or spill. Place heavier materials close to the ground and the lighter on top of these.
3. Stack and store materials neatly so that they are easily accessible and out of the way of paths and places where people walk.



Other considerations

1. Keep paths clear and level. Never dig a hole in a pathway or place where people walk.
2. Make garden bed edges strong so that they will not collapse or trip gardeners.
3. If digging a hole, make your work visible to gardeners passing by so they do not trip in it. Mark the excavation with coloured tape or a barrier, especially if you are leaving it for a while.
4. Cover standing water, such as in a pond, to reduce the incidence of mosquito breeding. Water plants such as azolla and duck weed reduce the surface area available to mosquitoes. Species of small native fish that eat mosquito wrigglers can be obtained.

