

# Gardening Tool Safety

*“A tool properly used will last a lifetime.  
A tool improperly used will break in a minute.”*

Information available from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission indicates more than 26,000 people were treated in hospitals during 2006 for injuries sustained while using garden hand tools. Typical injuries were strains/sprains to the lower back, shoulder, neck, and wrist. Many of these injuries can be prevented by properly using garden tools, by knowing your physical capabilities and keeping garden activities to within your limitations.



- Prior to use, always inspect garden hand tools for defects or damage (e.g., splintered, loose, bent, or cracked tool handles, mushroomed tool heads, sprung tool joints, worn tool teeth). If a tool fails your inspection, remove it from use.
- Always use the proper garden tool for the job. Wooden handles will break if improperly used. For instance, do not use a shovel when you need a metal digging bar, or a shovel, rake or hoe when you need a pick. Please let the tool librarian know what you’re doing so they can get you the right tool.
- If you don’t know how to use a tool, ask for training from a tool library staff member.
- If a tool breaks when you’re using it, stop using it immediately.
- Do not leave tools lying flat on the ground where they can be stepped on or where someone can trip on them. Lean them vertically against a wall or other secure location when not in use.
- Wear personal protective gear appropriate for the gardening task and weather conditions, including items such as a hat with brim, long-sleeved shirt, long pants, gloves, sunglasses, closed-toed shoes, and sunscreen.
- Use eye protection when the garden tool produces flying, crumbling, chipping, sparking, or splintering debris.
- Consume an adequate amount of water for gardening weather conditions.
- When gardening in warm weather, take frequent breaks in the shade.
- Keep the cutting edges of garden tools sharp. When cutting, always cut away from the body.
- Rotate gardening tasks frequently to reduce the potential for repetitive motion injuries.
- Stand with your back straight when using long-handled tools such as hoes, rakes, and shovels.
- Protect your back when picking up heavy items by maintaining a straight back, bending your knees, firmly grasping the object, and slowly lifting with your legs.
- Avoid using garden tools above your shoulder height.
- Always be aware of other who may be near you when working, especially when using tools that swing or that may send debris flying.
- Do not horseplay with garden tools. Keep children away from using the tools.
- Digging with your bare hands can result injuries such as cuts, punctures, or insect bites. Use a hand trowel or other tool and gloves instead of using your bare hands.
- When finished, clean garden the tools and put them away before returning them to the library.