

Gardening is one of the most popular leisure activities in New Zealand. Many people like to garden because it helps them relax and escape the stresses of life.

Gardening is a healthy and creative activity that lets people enjoy nature and grow their own produce. Vegetables picked fresh from the garden and washed well are tastier and richer in vitamins than vegetables which have been sitting in a shop.

But despite its quiet, healthy image, there are some risks involved in gardening. This simple safety guide is designed to help you reduce these risks and get even more enjoyment from your garden.

Wash hands thoroughly after working with soil, or handling soil-type products, mulches, compost or potting mix.

## Organisms in Garden Soil, Mulches, Compost or Potting Mix

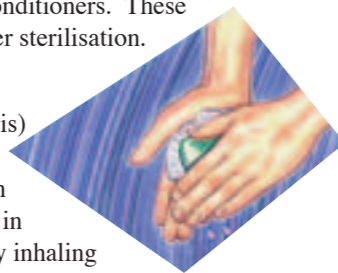
The soil is rich with many organisms which help the growth of healthy plants. But unwelcome organisms, such as *tetanus* and *Legionella* can also be found in garden soils and composted organic material, including commercially prepared products like potting mix and soil conditioners. These products can be re-infected even after sterilisation.

### LEGIONELLA

Legionnaires' disease (or legionellosis) is a form of pneumonia caused by a bacteria called *Legionella*. This is an environmental organism which lives in moist conditions. It can be caught by inhaling airborne droplets/particles containing the non-contagious bacteria. Legionellosis is an illness that may be mild, severe or even fatal, and is more common in older people, particularly if they smoke, have poor immunity or have a chronic illness.

To reduce the risk of exposure to *Legionella*:

- minimise the amount of dust when working in the garden
- water your garden and indoor plants using a gentle spray



- read the warning on bagged composted potting mixes
- wear gloves
- wear a dust mask so that any dust can be filtered out before you breathe it in
- dampen potting mixes before use
- open bags of soil products or composted potting mixes slowly, away from the face
- make sure the working area (glasshouse, potting shed) is well ventilated
- see your doctor immediately if you develop a flu-like illness which is worsening. Certain antibiotics are effective against legionellosis if given early.

### TETANUS

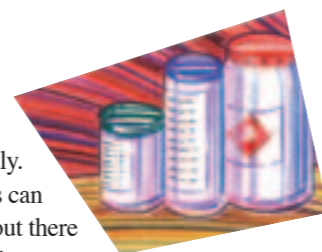
Tetanus is a serious illness at any age. Animal manures may contain this organism and it can be picked up through broken skin and puncture wounds.

- Keep cuts, scratches and grazes covered while working in the garden and make sure any injury that occurs is immediately and thoroughly cleaned.
- Tetanus vaccine has been given to children since 1960. If you have not had a course of 3 doses of tetanus and diphtheria vaccine as a child or adult, see your doctor or practice nurse. Adults need a booster of tetanus-diphtheria vaccine at age 45 and 65 years.

## Garden Chemicals

Sometimes gardeners turn to chemicals which can be hazardous if used, stored or disposed of incorrectly. Insecticides, herbicides and fungicides can help keep your garden looking great, but there are other techniques you can use to help your plants resist pests and disease.

'Companion planting' works on the theory that certain plants grow best when planted with others. You should include in your garden plants which have a naturally deterrent effect and



plants that attract helpful insects. For more information about these techniques consult gardening books and magazines or contact your local gardening centre.

To reduce the risks from chemicals:

- purchase only the quantity you need to do the job and avoid storing large quantities or mixtures of chemicals. Store incompatible chemicals separately to avoid fires and adverse chemical reactions keep oxidising agents such as nitrate fertilisers and chlorine-based swimming pool chemicals separate from flammable materials such as methylated spirits and kerosene and from certain fungicides (EDBC) which, when wet, will generate heat
- make sure that all chemicals are properly labelled and stored in their original container, preferably with a child-proof cap. Keep well out of the reach of children and away from food
- follow the mixing and application instructions on the label. Wear protective clothing when advised on the label and use any other necessary protective equipment, such as a respirator
- apply the spray when the air is still to avoid the chances of spray damage to other areas of the garden or neighbouring properties
- ask your local authority about the safest way to dispose of unused chemicals. They should not be poured into waste water or stormwater drains.

## Poisonous Plants

Some delightful plants which are common in our gardens are poisonous and able to cause a variety of reactions from mild skin irritation to a severe or even fatal response. Very few people die as a result of plant poisonings and current medical treatment is highly successful provided help is found quickly.

There is no simple way to identify poisonous plants. Some plants are entirely poisonous (or toxic), while other plants concentrate their poison in certain places like leaves or flowers. Some plants are toxic to animals but not to people. Small quantities of some plant toxins can have a severe effect while others only irritate if eaten in very large quantities.

- Children should be taught not to sample or play with leaves, berries, bulbs or flowers.
- Tell children to spit out any plant which "burns" their mouth and get help straight away. If you can, take a piece of the plant with you for identification purposes.
- Store bulbs and seeds out of sight and out of reach of young children.
- Keep the number of the National Poisons Centre – phone 0800 POISON (0800 774 766 – this is a 24-hour service) in a place you can find in a hurry. It is also listed with Emergency Services in the telephone book. For general enquiries phone (03) 479 7248 or email [poisons@otago.ac.nz](mailto:poisons@otago.ac.nz)

## Insect Stings and Bites

### BEEES AND WASPS

To avoid stings:



- avoid wearing perfumed products in the garden, eg. aftershave, highly fragrant deodorants, hair and skin products
- cover yourself with appropriate clothing, including gloves and footwear
- if you are stung by a bee try not to squeeze the venom bag at the outer end as you remove the sting. (A wasp does not leave its sting behind.)
- if any pain or irritation does not settle, or if the area is red and swollen, an antihistamine tablet will help. These are available over the counter from your local pharmacy or on a doctor's prescription
- if there is a severe reaction to the sting such as a rash, extreme swelling or difficulty with breathing see a doctor immediately or call for an ambulance.
- if you react badly to stings discuss the problem and possible solutions with your doctor.



# SAFER & HEALTHIER Gardening

## SPIDER BITES

Disturbing the black garden tunnel-web spider can result in a painful bite and localised swelling.







-  Wear gloves when working around woodpiles and crib walls where you may see the spider's thick, white, sheet-like webs.
-  The poisonous Katipo and red-back spiders are very rare. If you are bitten and suspect the spider may have been poisonous, see your doctor. If you can, take the spider with you for identification purposes.

For more information see *Spiders in New Zealand*. Code HE1424


## Garden Machinery

While gardening can be a quiet and peaceful time the equipment used in some gardening activities can damage hearing and cause other injuries. If used incorrectly or poorly maintained, lawnmowers, chainsaws, scrub cutters, trimmers, leaf shredders and wood chippers can all cause physical injury.



-  Keep your machinery in good repair and pay particular attention to engine covers and exhaust systems. Make sure any guards provided for the blade are fitted correctly.
-  When purchasing new garden equipment choose machines with a low noise level and check that silencers and covers are fitted properly.
-  Before you start, clear the working area (lawn, fence line, footpaths etc.) of stones or other objects which may be thrown by the machinery.
-  Wear protective equipment when using machinery (eg, an adequate grade of ear muffs or plugs, goggles and solid footwear like shoes or boots).
-  Follow the operating instructions for any machinery you use. Make sure you have an isolating transformer for electrical garden equipment or machinery.
-  When you hire equipment the hirer is obliged to provide you with safety information and ensure



familiarity with this safety information and any precautions that need to be taken.

-  Avoid using noisy equipment at unsociable hours or for extended periods.

For more information see *Noise Around the Home*. Code HE1122

## The Burning Question

Garden fires and incinerators can smoulder for long periods, giving off thick, smelly, unpleasant smoke. Plastics and treated timbers included in the fire can produce toxic fumes.

-  Minimise your need to burn by composting garden waste, recycling as many materials as possible and disposing of other rubbish at a landfill or tip.
-  Check whether your local authority has by-laws or rules in regional or district plans controlling the open burning/incineration of garden rubbish.



## Avoiding Injuries in the Garden




Falls and sprains are common garden injuries which can often be prevented by wearing non-slip footwear and keeping paths free of moss and algae or fallen leaves.

Regular walking or swimming will help to keep you agile and fit enough to tackle most gardening jobs with little risk of injury or strain. Gardening activities alone can keep you fairly fit, but if you build up slowly to the bigger gardening tasks, you won't have so many aches and pains at the end of the day.

### PROTECTING YOUR BACK

Many of the activities involved in developing and tending a garden require lifting, kneeling or bending. To protect your back when you are working in the garden:

-  place your feet apart for good balance and make sure you have a sound grip and footing
-  bend your knees instead of your back, then lift gradually and smoothly by straightening your knees




-  keep the load as close to you as possible and turn by moving your feet, not twisting
-  use long-handled tools so that you don't have to bend
-  work at ground level by resting on both knees and your free hand. Move frequently so that you don't have to stretch or reach.

Most garden centres stock a range of useful gadgets (eg, kneelers, long-handled tools) which make gardening easier for all ages and reduce the chance of injury occurring.

## Sunsmart

Melanoma is an increasing risk to New Zealanders who spend long periods out in the sun. The critical time is from November to March, between 11am and 4pm.



-  At these times plan to work in shadier areas and stay out of the sun as much as you can.
-  Wear a wide hat and a shirt with sleeves. Any skin left exposed should be protected with a broad-spectrum SPF 15+ sunscreen.
-  Show your doctor any moles or coloured skin lesions that grow or change in size, shape or colour.

*Gardening is a healthy creative activity which increasingly reflects our concern for the environment. Your common sense and these simple steps will help you to enjoy the pleasure of gardening well into the future.*



MANATŪ HAORA

New Zealand Government

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