

Lawn and Garden Safety
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As many of you may know, June is Dairy Month. Did you know June is also National Safety Month? National Safety Month was established by the National Safety Council (NSC) to inform individuals on an assortment of safety topics. The NSC believes that safety goes beyond the policies and programs found in the work environment, it carries over into all aspects of our lives including our homes. You will notice some of the same safety precautions used at work (earplugs, safety glasses, steel-toed shoes) are the same precautions used while working on your lawn and in your garden. Many websites, including the American College of Emergency Physicians (acep.org), the International Chiropractors Association (chiropractic.org), and the Center for Disease Control (cdc.gov) provide lawn and garden safety guidelines. In the spirit of National Safety Month, here are some of their safety guidelines to prevent injuries this lawn and garden season.

When working outside, protect yourself from sunburn and possible skin cancer by wearing a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, a broad-brimmed hat, sunglasses, and apply and reapply often, a sunscreen of SPF 15 or greater. If possible, avoid the hottest part of the day and garden in the early morning or late afternoon. Even on cloudy days remember to protect against the sun as 80% of the sun's harmful rays can seep through the clouds according to the Skin Cancer Foundation.

Heat and humidity can also take its toll on your body when working outside. Remember to stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water. Avoid drinking alcohol, soda and other sugary drinks while working in the heat, as they will make your body lose more fluids. Take plenty of rest breaks, preferably in a shady area where the body can cool down. Be aware of the symptoms of heat related illness such as extremely high body temperature, headache, rapid pulse, dizziness, nausea, confusion or unconsciousness, and be able to act accordingly, calling 911 if necessary.

Don't try to run a marathon session of gardening. According to the National Safety Council, overexertion is the third leading cause of emergency room visits for non-fatal unintentional injuries. To protect yourself from overdoing, warm up with slow stretches to loosen muscles and increase flexibility. Know your strengths and limitations. If there is any heavy lifting involved, ask for help instead of trying to do it yourself. Rotate tasks to avoid repetitive movements, don't work too long in one position, especially one that is awkward or unusual and take breaks as needed. If needed, talk to your health care provider if you have any concerns that may affect your ability to work in the garden safely.

When working outside don't throw safety to the wind, put safety first. Gardening tools and equipment can cause serious injury. Read any safety and owners manuals before using new tools. Make sure your lawn equipment and tools are working properly and cleaned and inspected regularly. Don't tamper with or remove safety guards or safety devices from equipment. Protect your eyes and ears by wearing safety glasses and earplugs; wear gloves to protect your hands and sturdy shoes, such as steel-toed work boots to protect your feet. Close fitting clothing should be worn so it won't get caught in moving parts of the lawn equipment.

The power lawn mower is one of the most dangerous tools around the home. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, approximately 68,000 people are treated in emergency rooms each year with lawn mower related injuries. Of those, more than 9,000 are younger than 18 years of age. Before mowing the lawn, do a once over of the yard and clear it of sticks, rocks, toys and any other debris that may be picked up and hurled by the lawn mower blade. The revolving blade of a lawn mower can throw objects at speeds of up to 200 mph or the length of a football field in one second. There is no time to dodge these thrown objects. It takes an adult about two-thirds of a second to react to danger and a young child will react slower according to the Mississippi State University Extension's article on lawn mower safety. Be aware of your surroundings when mowing. Make sure children and pets are indoors or a safe distance away from where you are mowing, it's important to keep children away from lawn mowers and other power equipment. **Never** let children be passengers on a riding mower, or play on or around them. Lawn mowers cause serious injury and even death to hundreds of children each year. Stop the mower whenever anyone enters the area in which you are working. Be sure to wear sturdy shoes, not sandals or sneakers, while mowing, along with safety glasses and earplugs or

earmuffs to protect the eyes and ears. Only mow when the grass is dry. Wet grass is slippery and there is a greater danger of a foot accidentally sliding into the mower, or if you are using an electric mower a person could be electrocuted if the cord were accidentally cut or the mower developed a short in the wiring. During the lawn-mowing season clean and safety-check your mower. If you have any doubt on how to adjust or repair your mower or sharpen the blade, see an expert. Also, remember to store the gasoline for your lawn mower in an approved container, away from a heat source and never store the gasoline in your house.

If you use any type of chemicals on your lawn or garden, such as pesticides, remember to read and follow all the label directions, including wearing the recommended protective clothing. Do not eat, drink or smoke when using pesticides, as traces of the chemicals may be transferred from your hand to your mouth. Wash your hands thoroughly after using chemicals. Store all chemicals in their original container, in a ventilated area that is out of the reach of children and pets. Do not reuse empty containers; they should be disposed of properly. The UW Extension Office has information available on the proper disposal of pesticides. The Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222) is also available 24/7 to answer questions about pesticides and pesticide safety.

One other safety tip from the CDC is to get a tetanus vaccination every 10 years. Tetanus lives in the soil and enters the body through breaks in the skin. As gardeners we use sharp tools, dig in the dirt, and handle plants with sharp points that leave us particularly prone to tetanus infections. Check with your health care provider if you are in need of a tetanus vaccination.

The American College of Emergency Physicians states that roughly 400,000 people are treated each year in hospital emergency rooms for lawn and garden injuries. While doing my research for this article I read where "safety practices are just common sense – but we often need reminders". Hopefully, you have been provided with a few reminders about safe practices that will keep you from becoming an emergency room statistic. Have a safe summer.