



Gardening Injury Prevention Tips

The American Society of Hand Therapists (ASHT) offers the following tips to protect hands and to prevent injuries while gardening.

1. ***Wear gloves at all times*** – Bacteria and fungus live in the soil and a small irritation or cut can develop into a major hand infection. Thick, leather or suede gloves may protect your hands from thorns, cuts and scrapes.
2. ***Keep your hands and arms covered*** – Be especially careful if you live in an area where you may disturb a snake, spider or rodent living in your garden. You will be better protected from poison ivy, insect bites and other common skin irritants that may inhabit a garden.
3. ***Take a break every hour or switch to another activity*** – Overuse of repetitive motions, such as digging, can cause tendonitis of the elbow or lead to carpal tunnel syndrome. Break up large tasks into short sessions, with a rest and stretch break between gardening sessions.
4. ***Use a tool when digging into unfamiliar or new areas*** – Buried sharp objects can cause tendon lacerations or punctures. Use the correct tool for the task at hand in order to avoid injury.
5. ***Store your tools to prevent accidents*** – Learn how to use and store your tools correctly to prevent accidents, and keep sharp tools out of the reach of children at all times. Also, make sure to put all tools away after use to prevent future injuries.
6. ***Use wide handled tools*** – Use tools with padded or thicker handles to protect the smaller joints in your hands. Working with your wrist in a more neutral or straight position will help to prevent injuries in the wrist and forearm.
7. ***Avoid sustained/constant gripping and awkward motions*** – Use both hands for heavy activities like lifting a bag of potting soil and alternate hands on more repetitive tasks like scooping dirt out of the bag into a pot. Sustained grip and repetitive motions can cause pain and lead to tendonitis.
8. ***Plan ahead*** – Use a basket or large handled container to carry supplies to the garden. The basket should be carried with both hands to distribute the workload equally and decrease stress in the joints of your upper body.
9. ***Don't sit back on your knees*** – Bending your knees this far is not only a hard position for the knee joint, but it requires you to push most of your body weight up with your hands and wrists, placing increased pressure on these joints as well. Instead, use a short gardening stool or bench.