



Spring Garden and Groundskeeping Safety

Spring marks the start of nice weather and often motivates people to do yard work. Getting outside, cleaning up, and adding some color to the landscape is always an accomplishment and a mood booster, but it can also leave you in pain the next day.

Here are some guidelines for “sprucing up” this season while avoiding the pain that often comes with it.

Be conscious of the weather. Wear sunscreen and take precautions against heat illness. On warm days, make an effort to drink lots of water, take breaks, and spend time in the shade to cool off. On the flip side, if it's wet outside, it can be easier to slip and fall. Therefore, make sure you wear appropriate footwear and be careful!

Whether digging a hole, pulling weeds, or dragging a hose, getting everything ready for a new season can take a toll. To avoid muscle soreness, take some time to warm up and stretch before you start. Stop periodically to check in with your body and take breaks when you need them. As much as it would be nice to get it all done at once, it might be best to spread the work out over a few days to avoid overexertion.

Overexertion and back injuries are common injuries from carrying heavy plants, tools, and mulch. Use a wheelbarrow if you have one and have any bulk shipments or plant deliveries placed as close as possible to the area where they will be used.

When digging holes for irrigation or new shrubs, use the right tool. A larger shovel might seem like the best choice, but the extra soil it can pick up can also result in back strains. Depending on where you are digging and how deep you need to go, you may need to be aware of underground utilities. It is always best to call before you dig. You can call 811 in any state to have utilities marked off before you get started.

Use chemicals such as pesticides and fertilizers carefully. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions for application and wear gloves and other personal protective equipment as recommended.

Be aware of snakes, bees, and other insects. Pay attention to what is around you and use bug spray to protect yourself against mosquitos.

Irrigation work is another task that can be hard on the body. Kneeling to reach pipes or make connections and carrying around hoses, PVC piping, and other tools, can also result in soreness and injury. Use kneepads if you'll be kneeling a lot and take breaks to stretch and move around. Never lift more than you can handle to speed things up, and always lift with your legs, not your back.

When selecting plants for your garden, keep in mind that some plants can grow to be much larger than their original size. Plan and consider power line locations when planting trees to avoid trimming them back later and pay attention to expected root growth to prevent damaging sidewalks and foundations.

Additional resources:

EHS Today: <https://www.ehstoday.com/health/article/21906301/the-break-room-planting-safety-awareness-at-home>

Call 811: <https://call811.com/811-In-Your-State>

Better Health Channel: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/HealthyLiving/gardening-safety>

OSHA: <https://www.osha.gov/landscaping>