

Thinking about safety in our community garden



The lack of serious accidents

...in community gardens is a sign that gardeners are exercising thoughtfulness and common sense – the two essential ingredients of safe gardening.

Now that more people are participating in Australia's growing number of community gardens, however, it may be timely for community garden coordinators and trainers to introduce the idea of safe gardening so that all can share in the responsibility of keeping our community gardens safe and happy places to cooperate in the adventure of food production and community building.

The information in this fact sheet was published earlier in the:

- *Carrs Park Community Garden Gardeners' Guidebook*, <http://pacific-edge.info/downloads/publications/>
- *Seed Savers' Network Seed to Seed* manual for school gardens, www.seedsavers.net

Thoughtfulness and common sense are needed

Our community garden must be maintained in a condition conducive to its safe use by gardeners and to visiting non-gardeners.

One way to ensure that community gardeners exercise garden safety is to introduce it in an introductory workshop.

Garden safety is very much about common sense and thinking about what we do. Garden safety is simple.

Avoid sunburn and dehydration

Wear a hat to avoid sunburn. If you sunburn easily, consider wearing a lightweight shirt with long sleeves as well as long trousers. Use a sunscreen cream to avoid sunburn. If in the garden for some time, remember to drink water to avoid dehydration.

Caring for children

To protect children from toxic or hazardous plants, avoid planting toxic plants and remove species (such as castor oil bush and oleander) that are toxic to children. Consider what might be a danger to children even if it is not dangerous to adults. It might be an idea to label hot-tasting plants such as chilli with visual and word warnings.

If growing water crops (such as water chestnut, arrowhead or watercress) in a container or pond, consider covering it with a barrier (weldmesh, for example) that prevents children falling in but lets the plants grow through. Keep a watch on young children in case they wander off-site.

Lifting

When lifting something heavy, bend your knees and crouch down, then lift it by straightening your legs.

To avoid back injury, do not bend over to pick up something that is heavy.



A pond covered with weldmesh

Storage

Designate an area of the garden for storing materials.

Store materials so that they are unlikely to fall over or spill.

Place heavier materials close to the ground and lighter materials on top of these.

Stack and store materials neatly so that they are easily accessible and out of the way of paths and places where people walk.

Avoid storing materials that the gardeners have no plans to use. This avoids community gardens becoming eyesores.



Dressed for summer in the garden



Care with creatures

Do not try to pick up bugs, spiders and other creatures you come across. They might defend themselves by biting, stinging or scratching.

Look before lifting buckets, watering cans, boxes and other things. Redback spiders sometimes nest in them and a bite can be dangerous.

If gardening near bushland, do not interfere with any snakes or goannas you see in the garden. Never try to pick up a snake or lizard nor attempt to kill it and force it to defend itself.

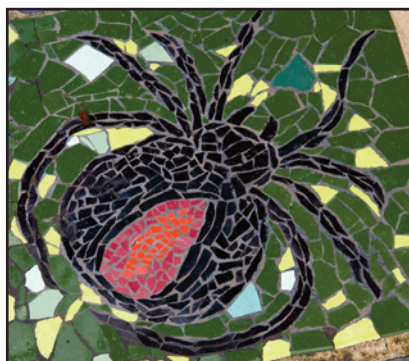
If your community garden keeps chooks, protect them from foxes with a high, sturdy fence with the wire dug into the soil at least ten centimetres to prevent foxes tunnelling into the pen.

Care with organic chemicals

The manufacture of organic controls for garden pest and plant disease management (sometimes called 'botanic' controls because they are derived from plants) should be done under the guidance of a gardener or adviser who has experience and is knowledgeable of the precautions to be taken in production, handling and application.

Some organic pesticides can cause injury. When making, handling and applying insecticides such as chilli spray, wear gloves and keep hands away from your face (chilli in the eyes is painful).

Avoid getting botanic sprays and other controls in your eyes or in cuts on your hands or legs. It is best to wear gloves when applying any botanic or synthetic control. Wash your hands after making, handling or applying organic pesticides, herbicides or other organic or synthetic controls.



Tool use

If you are taking more than one or two tools into the garden, carry them from storage into the garden in a wheelbarrow, bucket or a basket so there is a place to put them when they are not in use and at the end of the gardening session.

Before using a spade, garden fork, rake or other long handled tool, look to make sure there is nobody behind or beside you so that you don't hit them with the tool.

When you have finished using a garden tool or you put a tool aside for a moment, place it out of the way of people.

Never lay a tool across a path or place it in long grass where it is hidden and where people could trip over it.

Lean a garden rake or long handled tool against something when you put it aside. If you have to lay it down, place it away from where people might walk. Place it with the pointed tangs or blade on the ground, not pointing up. Alternatively, when putting a garden spade, shovel or fork aside, push it into the soil so that it remains upright and visible.

Carry tools such as spades, garden forks and rakes in your hand rather than over the shoulder. Carried on the shoulder, it is easy to hit someone accidentally if you turn around and they are close by.

Construction

When planning to build structures, obtain advice on design and construction, if that is unavailable among gardeners, so as the structure is sturdy and safe.

Keep paths clear and level. Make garden bed edges strong so that they will not collapse. Avoid edging garden beds with sharp, broken or pointed materials.

If digging a hole, make your work visible to gardeners passing by so they do not trip in it. Mark the excavation with coloured tape or a barrier if you are leaving it for a while.

Other precautions

If you suffer breathing difficulties or asthma, consider wearing a dust mask when making or turning compost or spreading mulch.

Consider wearing gardening gloves to protect your hands and to avoid blisters from handling garden tools, and when doing garden construction and spreading compost and mulch.

Wear enclosed shoes to protect your feet. Do not garden in sandals.

Cover standing water, such as in a pond, to reduce the incidence of mosquito breeding. Water plants such as azolla and duckweed reduce the surface area available to mosquitoes. Species of small native fish that eat mosquito wrigglers can be introduced.

