

hogco - health & safety issues

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how? <i>Risk level</i>	What are you already doing?	What further action is necessary?	Action by who?	Action by when?	Done
Strimming	Volunteers Flying debris <i>Medium risk</i>	When strimming, ensure that safety glasses and steel capped boots are worn, legs/arms are well covered Ensure everyone else is well away from the area being strimmed Consider any additional risk involved in advance				

Livestock

Parasitic and bacterial infections can result from contact with animal faeces or bites. Fencing and records of stock movement on your land are important. More information is available from the Health & Safety Executive's Agricultural Section (www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture).

Tools

Keeping your tools well-maintained makes them last longer and makes them safer to use. For example, use the safety catch on secateurs when the job's done and keep the blades of your shears sharp. You can often take them to a garden centre for sharpening. Working with blunt tools takes up more time and energy and can put unnecessary pressure on joints and muscles. Personal protective equipment (PPE) including steel-capped shoes should be worn when using mechanised tools, and only those who are fully trained should use chainsaws. Store petrol carefully. Electricity in the garden needs to be treated with extra caution as conditions are often wet. Power tools present risks while in use. Make sure your risk assessment covers all these issues.

By taking safety precautions and working tidily i.e. keeping tools in a secure toolbox and maintaining them regularly, you will reduce the risk of injury.



Risk Assessments

Few people like filling in forms! However, unless you do regular risk assessments (see above), your insurance cover will be invalidated.

Risk assessments are just:

- a list of potential risks for a particular activity
- an assessment of how likely the event is to occur
- actions need to minimise the risk, and
- a record of when the action has been completed.

For your regular gardening and work days, annual risk assessments should be sufficient. If you are running an event with extra risks e.g. use of chainsaws or electricity outdoors, you should perform another risk assessment for those specific risks.

Volunteers should be made aware of any risks and how to avoid accidents BEFORE any activity.

Your group should ideally have a Health and Safety Officer who makes sure the risk assessments are done and a record kept. She should also make sure the First Aid Kit is regularly checked and restocked.

Template risk assessment sheets are available from our website: www.hogco-devonrcc.org.uk.

The information in the sheet is meant as a guide only. Groups should consult Health and Safety experts for further advice.

Information sourced from:

www.bbc.co.uk/gardening
www.doctorgreenfingers.co.uk
www.hse.gov.uk
www.safegardening.co.uk
www.thrive.org.uk

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home grown - community owned information sheet



health and safety issues



The last thing anyone wants is for someone to be hurt while gardening or attending a community event. Around 300,000 individuals in the UK attended Accident and Emergency departments after having an accident in the garden in 2004. Some 87,000 people were actually injured while gardening.

The lawnmower tops the list of the most dangerous pieces of equipment, with 6,500 lawn mower related accidents reported each year. Surprisingly, the innocuous flowerpot is the second most dangerous tool, causing 5,300 accidents, with falls, cuts and lifting injuries some of the most common types of accident recorded.

Health and safety advice might sound like common sense, but it's incredible how many people end up in hospital because they haven't taken basic safety precautions in the garden. Make it part of your regular event planning.

It is essential that your group:

- has a health and safety policy in place
- carries out risk assessments regularly, and
- has appropriate insurance.

HogCO has a template Health & Safety policy and template Risk Assessment sheets covering outdoor activities, and also for when you're running indoor events. It doesn't take long, and without it, your insurance may not be valid. These are downloadable from the Toolkits and Downloads page of our website:

www.hogco-devonrcc.org.uk

Gardening and working outdoors bring many health benefits but also pose a range of health & safety issues. Try to think about how to deal with these, and make sure that all the volunteers on site are aware of the risks and how to avoid them. They include:

- Tetanus
- Stings
- Exposure to cold (and heat!)
- Glass from greenhouses
- Heavy lifting
- Garden chemicals
- Tools - hand and mechanised
- Hygiene & infectious agents
- Livestock.



Tetanus

This is caused by *Clostridium* bacteria found in soil and on rusty metal. It can cause illness if allowed to enter the body through a cut or graze. Gardeners are advised to keep their anti-tetanus vaccinations up to date and cover any cuts with dressings while working outdoors.

Stings

Be familiar with basic first aid for the relief of stings. Anaphylactic shock is a severe allergic reaction to stings, causing swelling (including the airways). Sufferers often carry medication to deal with this, but training is advised for garden members to know how to react in such cases.

Exposure to cold and heat

Being outdoors for long periods doesn't suit everyone, particularly those who are less mobile. Advise people to bring enough clothing, waterproofs and suitable footwear in the colder months.

Icy and cold conditions can make surfaces dangerous. It is important to assess the site if this is likely BEFORE allowing volunteers to start work.



Garden chemicals

We would all tend to think of a beautiful garden as a safe haven in which to relax and soak up the peaceful bliss, but there are many things contained within a garden environment that can be poisonous if we are not careful.

These could include garden chemicals such as weed killers, pesticides, paint stripper, methylated spirits, petrol, insect repellents and any other similar items you might keep in your garden shed. In the garden itself, there could be poisons in the earth or compost and, perhaps, you might have planted certain things which can be highly poisonous. Plus, specific insects such as bees can also leave harmful poison in our bloodstream so it's important to know what to do if you suspect somebody has been poisoned or if you think you, yourself, might have been.

Symptoms can include nausea, vomiting, fever, shivering, abdominal pain, weakness, drowsiness, headache, irritability, swallowing difficulty, salivation, skin rash, burns around the mouth and nose, fits and seizures, skin rashes, blurred vision and coma to name but some.

Call the emergency services

Time is of the essence in making sure that the effects from possible poisoning are reduced, so even if you're not sure what exactly is wrong with the person, if you suspect poisoning, don't hesitate to call 999 to seek immediate medical assistance.



Hygiene and infectious agents

The garden can contain *E. coli* (which can be life threatening) that can exist in manure, as well as other bacteria - e.g. from rat's urine. Threadworm eggs are also found in soil. To minimise risks, wear gloves, do not put your hands near your mouth while gardening and wash your hands afterwards. Hand washing facilities should be available, or sanitising gels should be used.

Blood-borne diseases (e.g. hepatitis, HIV) should not normally be transmitted during gardening activities. However, any cuts or puncture wounds should be dealt with carefully, to minimise exposure to blood. Infection can be transmitted through open wounds, grazes, eczema, etc. Encourage gardeners to wear gloves, as there may often be pieces of glass or metal buried in the soil.

Ponds

The risk of drowning exists even if there are only 2 inches of water in a pond. When establishing a pond, choose a location where it can be easily seen from all areas of the garden and don't let children play near it



unsupervised. Put a fence around the pond to ensure that children cannot get near to it and grow plants around it to make it harder for them to get near the edge. It's also a good idea to design the pond with gently sloping edges. This is safer than a sudden drop into deep water.

If the pond is small, it can be covered with a combination of heavy duty wooden trellises and steel mesh. It's also possible to buy a safety grid that sits just below the surface of the water but it is important to make sure that the grid could not dip below the water level if it had a child's weight on it.

Glass

Glass can break quite easily and cause injuries resulting from the shards. Cuts can spread blood-borne viruses, as well as be dangerous if very deep. Many gardens now use polycarbonate or other materials in place of glass. If new glass is brought on site, it should have the British Safety Standard Kitemark for horticultural glass.

Heavy lifting

Gardening can cause strain injuries to many parts of the body. There are ways to minimise the heavy work e.g. 'no-dig gardening', use of alternative tools and garden bed design, such as raised beds. If you must lift something heavy, bend your knees and keep your back straight!

First Aid Kit

You should always have a first aid kit available at all your events and work days.

Suggested contents:

- 20 individually wrapped sterile plasters (assorted sizes), appropriate to the type of work (you can provide hypoallergenic plasters, if necessary)
- two sterile eye pads
- four individually wrapped triangular bandages, preferably sterile
- six safety pins
- two large, individually wrapped, sterile, unmedicated wound dressings
- six medium-sized, individually wrapped, sterile, unmedicated wound dressings
- a pair of disposable gloves (see HSE's free leaflet: *Latex and you*).

It is recommended that you don't keep tablets and medicines in the first-aid box.