

Protect Yourself: Be Safe, Beware, Be Observant, Be Prepared

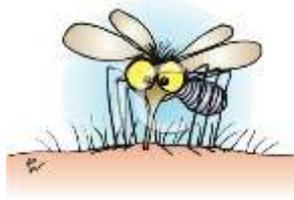
By Janice Tapp, Bexar County Master Gardener Intern

There are many risks gardeners are aware of in South Texas and some risks are not as evident. Gardening can be a fun, relaxing, safe, and productive hobby if one practices it safely. Consider some of the risks presented in this article and be observant and proactive.



Problem: The first and foremost concern most gardeners consider is the **sun** with its relentless heat. Staying out of the sun after 10 am in the summer is a well-known fact, but there are several issues the sun will alert us to. Dehydration can happen rather quickly with some individuals. Sun exposure can still cause sunburn, even with UV protection and frequent re-application. Eyes need sun protection, too, as evidence shows too much can accelerate cataracts.

Solution: UV protection clothing is popular and of course, frequent application of sunscreen products, according to directions. Hats, gloves, and eye coverings can keep those rays from causing burns and skin damage. Carry water and drink frequently. Take breaks out of the sun.



Problem: Bites! Insects and critters own the outdoors as their homes and we must be observant for the defensive mechanisms they will employ to protect them. Snakes, bees, wasps, scorpions and spiders live under rocks, in trees and bushes, and even in containers such as pails and birdhouses. Mosquitoes are a never-ending problem during most of the year. Crawling critters such as armadillos, raccoons, mice and squirrels may seem problematic in the sense that their droppings cause infectious diseases.

Solution: Protective sprays or even aromatherapy such as lavender essential oils may repel those pesky bugs. Be observant! Look under and in before touching, or use a gardening tool to tap the bushes. Wear gloves and proper foot coverings with closed toes. Use good hand hygiene after gardening. Carry wipes for cleaning, if water is unavailable and carry a first aid kit to treat those bites immediately.



Problem: Personal safety may not be the first thing thought about when doing gardening chores, but a fall over roots, equipment, or anything in your walking path could land you into sprains, fractures, or injury. When working with certain plants, scratches or reactions may affect the skin. The skin is always vulnerable to rashes or injury from chemicals used in the garden. Lifting without using good body

mechanics may result in back strain, knee or shoulder injury related to improper form or too heavy a load.

Solution: Practice good body mechanics and lift using quads and core. Ask for help lifting. Use tools such as a wheelbarrow or wagon to carry heavy loads. Observe and pay attention to surroundings and keep tools off the ground. Clear pathways. Protect eyes, breathing, and skin when using chemicals and sprays and even use sleeves and gloves when cutting thorny bushes. Use the right tool for the job. Use adjuncts such as knee pads to save knees and back from bending strains. Get up slowly from a bending or kneeling position to prevent falls from dizziness.



First aid kits have been around for over 100 years. Carry a first aid kit in your tool bag or box, so it is available when you need it. Treating a cut quickly may decrease risk of infection. Kit may be purchased or simply put together in a zip lock bag. What should a kit contain? Alcohol wipes, a skin cleaning antiseptic, various size band aids, and antibiotic gel, gauze pads and wrap, adhesive tape, cold compress, gloves, tweezers, aspirin 81 mg and Benadryl 25 mg. The CDC recommends a booklet or course in first aid which is available through the American Red Cross. Using a kit for any of the gardening problems is a good common-sense practice when that unsuspected incident happens that could take all the joy out of that wonderful gardening experience.

Be sure to keep your cell phone handy, and if the need arises, dial 911 for emergencies where first aid does not apply.

Be prepared, be knowledgeable, and protect yourself.

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