

## Gearing Up for Safe and Comfortable Gardening

by Rita Pelczar

**G**ARDENING INVOLVES a lot of strenuous physical activity, and as Kris Wetherbee points out in her article "Staying Safe in the Garden" on page 36, injuries occasionally occur if you are not cautious. More frequently, gardeners suffer from over exposure to the sun, sore joints, and tired muscles—not major injuries, just bodily wear and tear.

There are some very good products that are designed to promote safety, provide protection from environmental hazards, and reduce the stress of gardening activities. Here are several that I have found helpful.

### PROTECTIVE ACCESSORIES

Wearing appropriate clothing—a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, a wide-brimmed hat, closed-toe shoes, gloves—and sunscreen makes sense for any outdoor gardening task. For some jobs, additional protective gear should be used for ear and eye protection.

A gardener's hands need protection from thorns, sharp rocks, spider bites, poison ivy, and the like. And palms appreciate some padding to prevent blisters. For heavier jobs, Duluth Trading Company offers comfortable **Goatskin Gloves** that have a reinforced palm, index finger, and thumb—the areas that get high wear. Mine get a lot of use, and over time they've softened, fitting now even better than when they were new.

**Hestra Leather Garden Rose Gloves** from Gardener's Edge are great for pruning roses or working with any thorny plant. The extended heavy-duty cowhide cuffs protect your forearms almost to the elbow, while the more flexible goatskin portion that covers your hands has a reinforced palm.

For lighter jobs such as transplanting annuals or weeding, I like breathable gloves



**Top:** Fully protected from the sun, the author models a wide-brimmed hat, Duluth Trading Company's Goatskin Gloves, Long Sleeve Action Shirt, and Dry on the Fly Pants. **Above:** Hestra Leather Garden Rose Gloves.

that allow for manual dexterity. **Protexgloves Elle Grip** by Foxgloves are a good choice. Made of machine-washable Supplex nylon with Lycra for extra stretch, they are tough but flexible. They also provide sun protection for hands and forearms with a 50+ Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF) rating and sleeves that extend to the elbow.

Clothes that block exposure to harmful UV rays are worth considering if you spend a lot of time outdoors. My **UV Skinz long sleeve shirt** gets a lot of wear and saves me from having to constantly reapply sunscreen. The fabric is breathable and quick drying. The company offers protective clothing for men, women, and kids—all rated UPF 50+. It also offers hats and visors to safeguard your face.

Another good source of UV protective clothing is Duluth Trading Company. I particularly

like its **Long Sleeve Action Shirt** and **Dry on the Fly Pants**. Both are lightweight, moisture-wicking, and have a UPF rating of 50+, so they protect while keeping you cool. And they are constructed with comfort and flexibility in mind. The pants, in particular, have become part of my "garden uniform" this summer.

To shield eyes from flying debris, Lee Valley Tools offers **Tinted Safety Glasses** that double as sunglasses that block UV rays. The anti-fog polycarbonate lens wraps protectively around the eye area and the arms are adjustable for a good fit. These are important to wear when working with power equipment or applying pesticides.

I find it's easy to forget you're wearing **Elevox Anti-Noise MaxiMuff™ Ear Protectors**, available from Gardener's Edge, except that they reduce the noise of my



**Top left:** Lee Valley's Tinted Safety Glasses. **Left:** Elevox Anti-Noise MaxiMuff™ Ear Protectors. **Above:** Fiskars PowerGear2™ Bypass Loppers.

mower and weed whip to a light hum. They are lightweight and adjustable, with softly cushioned muffs that fit comfortably over the ears.

### RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

A lot of wear and tear on your muscles and joints can be avoided simply by using the right tool for the job at hand. Ergonomically designed tools can really help reduce the stress of jobs that involve repetitive motion. Pruning tools are a good case in point.



**ComfortGEL hand tools from Corona Tools**

For deadheading flowers, snipping herbs, or other jobs that require cutting precision, there's no need for heavy-duty pruners. The **Little Buddy Hydroponic**

**Clipper** and the **Compact Shear**, both from Dramm, have stainless steel blades, and are small, durable, and lightweight. Designed with curved plastic handles, they are just the right size for thinning seedlings.

For medium-sized pruning jobs—up to 3/4-inch-diameter stems or branches—Fiskars offers the **PowerGear2™ Pruner**. Its patented gear design gives this bypass pruner more power for less effort. A low-friction coating on the steel blades helps prevent sap buildup and rust. And the contoured handle rolls as you squeeze

to reduce fatigue, which took getting used to, but I've come to appreciate it for big pruning jobs.

For bigger jobs, the **PowerGear2™ Bypass Loppers** are available in three sizes: 18, 25, and 32 inch. With similar gears and blades as the above pruners, the 32-inch loppers slice through branches up to two inches in diameter. The rounded handles are designed for comfort.

Fiskars makes other ergonomic hand tools. I particularly like the **Ergo Weeder** with its large, curved grip and comfortable thumb rest that reduces hand and wrist fatigue. The forked end snags deep-root-

ed weeds like dandelions; the curve of the blade serves as a fulcrum to give you extra leverage. I also like the **Big Grip Knife**, a multi-purpose tool with a serrated edge for cutting and a forked tip for prying out weeds, rocks, or roots. Its large padded handle is very comfortable.

Ergonomic hand tools are also available from Corona Tools. The **ComfortGEL®** and **eGrip Trowels, Transplanters, and Weeders** have comfortable molded grips and thumb rests. The weeder, in particular, with its built-in fulcrum and serrated edge, is a winner.

For moving heavy loads, spare your back by using a wheelbarrow or garden cart. The **Folding Marine Utility Cart** from Life With Ease is a sturdy, lightweight cart that is very maneuverable and collapsible! Its handles are retractable and it folds for easy storage. Constructed of durable aluminum, it

### Sources

- Corona Tools**, <http://coronatoolsusa.com>.
- Dramm**, [www.rainwand.com/cutting.html](http://www.rainwand.com/cutting.html).
- Duluth Trading Company**, [www.duluthtrading.com](http://www.duluthtrading.com).
- Fiskars**, [www.fiskars.com](http://www.fiskars.com).
- Gardener's Edge**, [www.gardenersedge.com](http://www.gardenersedge.com).
- Lee Valley Tools**, [www.leevalley.com](http://www.leevalley.com).
- Life With Ease**, [www.lifewiththeease.com](http://www.lifewiththeease.com).
- UV Skinz**, [www.uvskinz.com](http://www.uvskinz.com).

carries up to 330 pounds, and its front panel slides off so you can dump a load of soil or compost just by tipping it up.

I spend a lot of time kneeling in the garden and my knees appreciate the cushioning from hard surfaces that **Kneelo® Memory Foam Kneeling Pad** from Lee Valley Tools provide. Made of resilient memory foam, it's just 20 inches long and 12 inches wide, light, and has a cut-out handle for carrying.

If you use appropriate equipment like these items to reduce environmental and physical gardening stress, it will go a long way towards keeping you safe—and keeping you gardening.

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