

Safety Note #157

SAFE USE OF RAKES AND SHOVELS



Information available from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission indicates more than 28,000 people nationwide received hospital treatment during 2009 for unpowered garden tool injuries, including the use of rakes and shovels. Typical injuries were strains to the back, shoulder, and wrist and lacerations caused by stepping on a rake. Many of these injuries were avoidable and due to inattention or improper handling of the rake or shovel and could have been prevented by using the precautions given below.

Precautions for the Safe Use of Rakes and Shovels

- Prior to use, always inspect the rake or shovel for defects or damage (e.g., splintered, loose, bent, or cracked tool handles, loose connections, and damaged tines or blade).
- Any tool with defects must be removed from service by attaching a red tag that states “DO NOT USE.” Complete red tag with appropriate information.
- It is a good safety practice to loosen your muscles by stretching and performing light exercise before using a shovel or rake. Likewise, it is a good safety practice to also stretch your muscles when done raking or shoveling.
- Pace yourself as you rake or shovel. Take frequent breaks and consume adequate water for the weather conditions.
- Use a rake or shovel that is comfortable for your height and strength. Do not use a rake or shovel that is too long or heavy for you. A shovel should have a length that is approximately the same as from the ground to between your elbow and chest height.
- Wear gloves to protect your hands from blisters.
- Wear sturdy, closed-toed shoes or boots when raking or shoveling.
- When raking, stand upright and use the rake to pull leaves or dirt towards you.
- Bend your knees when picking up leaves or clippings for disposal.
- Before shoveling, inspect the area for obstructions such as cables and pipes.
- When shoveling, stand upright and bend your knees so your legs carry most of the load. Push the shovel blade into the soil or material to obtain a shovel load. Keep your arms and elbows close to your body when handling a shovel load.
- Lift the shovel load by straightening your legs.
- Never twist your trunk when raking or moving a shovel load. Always turn your feet and body in the direction where you wish to pile leaves or spread or drop the shovel load.
- Never overextend your arms or shoulders to load a shovel.
- When digging, use the ball of your foot to push the shovel blade into the ground.
- Shovel loads should not be thrown above about four feet or further than about three feet. Never toss or flip shovel loads over your shoulder.
- Never lay a garden rake down with the teeth pointing up – the teeth should always be pointing down
- The weight of the shovel load and shovel should not exceed about 15 pounds.
- When raking or shoveling for long periods, vary your arm and leg positions and movements.

