Landscaping – Working with Hand Tools Meeting Kit

WHAT'S AT STAKE

We're talking about the everyday stuff, right? Pruners, shovels, rakes… they might not seem as scary as a chainsaw, but trust me, you can still get hurt pretty easily if you're not careful. A slip with the pruners and you've got a nasty cut. All that digging and bending over with a shovel? Your back and shoulders can really start to scream after a while. And don't even get me started on blisters from gripping tools all day!

It's not just sudden injuries, either. Doing the same motions over and over can really wear your body down in the long run. Plus, out there in the garden, you've got thorns, potentially poisonous plants, and all sorts of bugs waiting to have a go at you. So, yeah, even though they're 'just' hand tools, you've got to respect them and how you use them, otherwise, you're looking at pain, time off work, and just feeling plain miserable.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Let's dig into the potential dangers when we're out there using hand tools in landscaping. You might think they're harmless, but they can definitely cause some issues if we're not paying attention.

- **Risk of Lacerations and Puncture Wounds:** Tools with sharp edges or points, such as pruners, shears, shovels (edges), and rakes (tines), can easily cause cuts and punctures if mishandled or if a slip occurs during use.
- **Potential for Musculoskeletal Strains and Sprains:** The repetitive motions and forceful actions involved in using various hand tools like shovels, rakes, hoes, and even prolonged use of smaller tools like trowels and hand forks

can strain muscles and sprain ligaments, particularly affecting the back, shoulders, arms, and wrists.

- **Development of Blisters and Abrasions:** Continuous gripping and the friction between hands and the handles of tools like shovels, rakes, pruners, and trowels can lead to the formation of painful blisters and skin abrasions, especially when gloves are not worn or are inadequate.
- **Exposure to Eye Injury from Projectiles:** Activities such as digging with shovels or hoes and raking can dislodge soil particles, small stones, and plant debris, which can be propelled into the eyes, causing irritation or more serious injury.
- **Hazard of Impact Injuries:** Accidental dropping of heavy hand tools like shovels, loppers, or even a sudden, forceful contact with a hard object while using a tool can result in impact injuries to the hands, feet, or other parts of the body.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Protecting yourself from injuries while using hand tools involves a combination of using the right equipment, employing proper techniques, and being aware of your body and surroundings.

Using the Right Gear and Being Smart About Our Tools:

First off, let’s talk about our personal protective equipment – our PPE. Think of it as your everyday uniform that helps keep you safe.

- **Gloves:** Seriously, wear them. They’ll save you from blisters, cuts from sharp edges, and all those prickly surprises plants like to throw at us. Plus, they give you a better grip.
- **Eye Protection:** Even if it’s “just” a shovel, bits of dirt and stuff can still fly up. A good pair of safety glasses is a small thing that can save you a big headache (or worse).
- **Sturdy Boots:** You want something that’ll protect your feet if you drop a tool – and trust me, it happens! Good traction

helps too, especially on uneven ground.
- **Long Sleeves and Pants:** These are your basic armor against scratches, scrapes, and those annoying itchy plants.

Now, about the tools themselves: grab the right one for the job. Don’t try to make a trowel do the work of a shovel! Check your tools before you start – are the handles solid? Are the blades sharp enough (a sharp tool is actually safer because you don’t have to force it as much)? And when you’re carrying them around, keep the pointy bits away from you and your buddies.

Working Smart and Looking After Our Bodies:

It’s not just about what you’re holding; it’s about how you’re moving. When you’re digging or lifting, try to use your legs more than your back – your future self will thank you. Get a good, stable stance so you’re not wobbling around. And try not to reach way out or twist your body into weird angles. Move your feet instead. When you’re doing the same thing over and over, like raking, try to keep your movements smooth and steady. And listen to your body – if you’re feeling stiff or tired, take a break. Pushing through when you’re worn out is a recipe for mistakes.

Being Aware of What’s Around Us:

Keep an eye on where you’re working. Is the ground uneven? Are there any hidden holes or tripping hazards? Also, think about who else is around. Give them plenty of space when you’re swinging a tool. And before you start digging, take a quick look up for any power lines and think about what might be buried underground.

FINAL WORD

A little extra thought before anyone swings a tool or plants a shrub can save a lot of discomfort down the road. Make those safe habits automatic, so everyone can focus on the job and go home feeling good.