

Safe Use of Rakes & Shovels

Precautions for the Safe Use of Rakes and Shovels



- Select the correct shovel or rake for your job. A square-bladed shovel is used for lifting and moving loose material. A round-bladed shovel is used for digging and a garden spade for turning soil, transplanting, and edging. Fan-shaped leaf rakes are for raking leaves and other garden debris. Level-headed rakes are used for grading and smoothing garden surfaces.

- 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).
- If a rake or shovel fails your inspection, remove it from use.
- It is a good safety practice to loosen your muscles by stretching and performing light exercise before using a shovel or rake.
- Pace yourself as you rake or shovel. Take frequent breaks and consume adequate water for the gardening 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 garden 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 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 lay a garden rake down with the teeth pointing up – the teeth should always be pointing down
- When raking or shoveling for long periods, vary your arm and leg positions and movements