

# 2009 AWARD OF MERIT WINNER

## GARDEN SAFETY

By Betty Ann Cassina, Consulting Rosarian

The joy of gardening is known to add years to ones' life but we need to make sure they are healthy years that are injury free. The old saying that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" couldn't be truer than when applied to self-inflicted wounds in the rose garden.

**Thorn Protection** – We already know the importance of a good pair of thorn-proof gloves when working around roses but don't forget to protect your knees – kneeling on a rose thorn can be a painful experience that can be tough to heal; use strap-on knee pads or an inexpensive kneeling pad.

**Protect your back** – The term "week-end warrior" goes back a long way and I used to be one of them – working in an office all week and trying to get all of my yard work done in just two days. A sure formula for back and muscle strains is not taking the time to stretch before you begin and then pacing yourself, just as you would at the gym, changing between strenuous and light-duty chores often. My physical therapist (who I have on speed dial) told me that bending and sideways twisting puts the most strain on the back, especially when combined with repeated heavy lifting. When I went to an almost all "pot" garden (roses in 15 gallon containers) I started using a smaller, shorter shovel to keep whatever I was shoveling from spilling over the side of the pot; an unexpected benefit was that it placed less stress on my hands and wrists plus my back.

**Protect your eyes.** I have several types of pump-up sprayers and when I use the smaller 1 or 2-gallon ones, when I am ready to rinse them I tend to hold them under one arm while I unscrew the top with the opposite hand. Sometimes there is still enough pressure in the container that it will release a pretty strong vaporized mist which is what happened to me several weeks ago. Thankfully, I had on a pair of close-fitting safety goggles that prevented the mist of fungicide from getting in my eyes. Safety glasses or any kind of glasses are a good thing to wear when working around bushes in general. Our eyes become focused on something in the back of the bush and as we reach in, a branch in the front of the bush is pointing right at us.

**Read those labels.** Every product you buy has an information label on it that should be read before you use it. Be it a fertilizer, fungicide, or insecticide, become familiar with the correct rate of application and any warning information the label recommends. Do not use fungicides or insecticides at half strength, it only aids the pathogen or insect to build up immunity which will create the need for stronger chemicals in the future and I am all for less chemicals and personally no longer use any form of insecticide. Also, never separate the chemicals from their original containers. If the label becomes illegible or got wet and comes off, there are safety data sheets available at the store where you purchased the item or you can check the internet for additional information.

**Immunization** – There is no current immunization for not buying more roses than you have room for in your garden. That said; please let me impress on you the importance of keeping your tetanus shot current. The recommended frequency is every ten years so check your health records to verify that you are up-to-date, everyone who works with the soil should make this a priority.

**Tools** – Use the right tool for the job you are doing. Substituting a makeshift tool can be an accident waiting to happen. Keep your shears and spades sharp and clean them after every use. I have found that keeping a light-weight garden cart handy (that means empty) is an extremely helpful aid in moving pots, unloading bags of soil or compost, and other gardening activities.

The smell of spring is in the air, trees are beginning to blossom and I can hardly wait for the first roses of the season!

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