

PROFILE

Dynamic Gardening Ltd.

Vancouver, BC

Dealing with the dangers of gardening

When most people think of gardening, they probably think of warm summer evenings, a riot of flowers, or the bounty of a vegetable harvest. Danger is not likely to come to mind. But for Trudy Vanderburg, the hazards of garden maintenance — like back injuries and toxic pesticides — are always at the forefront of her thoughts.

Vanderburg is the owner of Dynamic Gardening Ltd., a Vancouver garden maintenance company with 3 full-time employees and additional seasonal workers. Her safety-conscious approach to bending and lifting has kept her staff from serious back injuries over the years and allowed them to stay in the industry. “Many people leave the gardening profession because of back injuries, gardening’s most common hazard,” She credits their good safety record and retention of employees to the training she provides and her workers’ willingness to use good body mechanics. Vanderburg also takes time each day, as she works alongside her employees, to point out strain-saving techniques. “If I see someone bending the wrong way, I show them how to do it right,” she says. “After a while, it becomes second nature for them to do things properly, and I don’t have to remind them as often. They know why I’m concerned, and that I care about keeping them safe on the job.”



Proper equipment is also critical in preventing back injuries in gardening, according to Vanderburg. Workers who are forced to bend over because their equipment isn’t right for the job tire out much more quickly, and are at higher risk of back problems. So Vanderburg equips her staff with hoes and shovels with long enough handles, and the knowledge to use them correctly. She also shows them basic techniques such as how to use a wheelbarrow correctly and how to handle a tarp filled with debris.

One of the challenges that Dynamic Gardening faces is the difficulty of providing enough safety training for her many part-time and seasonal employees. Most of Dynamic’s full-time employees have studied gardening at college, where safety training is part of the curriculum. However, most of her part-time or seasonal employees haven’t had any prior training. Also, they’re hired when the company is really busy and time is at a premium. For her, posters and pamphlets don’t work. She is currently working with a back care specialist to produce a video that will teach gardening procedures like weeding, hoeing, and picking up heavy tarps for her seasonal employees. Vanderburg believes this type of tool could provide basic safety training for her part-time employees, which she could then reinforce on the job.

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Another concern is exposure to toxic chemicals such as pesticides. Whenever possible, Dynamic uses organic alternatives, such as beer for snail bait and soaps against insects. Vanderburg believes that exposure to most chemicals can be avoided by seeking out organic products. “Not only do I think of organic gardening as a way to save the world, but I also see it as a way of protecting my employees from exposure to toxic chemicals on a daily basis.” Her environmentally friendly approach is also popular with clients, so it’s good for business.

Vanderburg sees safety as an attitude rather than a workplace requirement. “After 20 years in the gardening business, I’ve trained a lot of people. It’s my second nature now.”

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