

Sun Protection for Gardeners

by Rita Pelczar

GARDENERS ARE weather-conscious folks. After all, we gauge many of our activities on temperatures, rainfall, and sunshine. Blue skies and sunny days naturally draw us outdoors to set out those new plants, dig a new bed, or just sit back and relax. But that attraction can be dangerous. Because we spend so much of our time outside, it makes sense to protect ourselves from the damaging effects of solar radiation.

According to the American Academy of Dermatology, 90 percent of skin cancers are linked to exposure to the sun, as are premature aging and cataracts. It's the invisible ultraviolet (UV) rays of the sun that are the culprit and they come in two types: UVA rays penetrate deeply into the skin and cause the visible skin changes associated with aging; UVB rays affect surface layers of the skin and cause sunburn. And UV damage is cumulative, so even when the sunburn fades there are lasting effects.

The best ways to minimize sun damage are to limit the time you spend outside when the UV rays are strongest; and, when you are outside, to wear sunscreen and appropriate clothing.

SUNSCREENS GUARD BARE SKIN

Every sunscreen is rated according to its "sun protection factor" (SPF), which is primarily a measurement of its protection from sunburn-causing UVB rays. The higher the SPF, the greater the pro-



tection. When properly applied, the SPF number indicates how many times longer you can stay in the sun before you burn. So if you usually begin to burn after 10 minutes in the sun, an SPF 15 sunscreen theoretically allows you to extend your exposure to 150 minutes.

Some sunscreens include ingredients that screen UVA rays as well as UVB rays,

but at this time, there is no approved rating system for UVA protection. Nevertheless, it's advisable to use a broad-spectrum formula that covers both types of UV rays. If you are prone to allergic reactions, use a PABA-free, hypoallergenic formula.

Correct and continuous application of a sunscreen is critical if it is to be effective. Apply it liberally to all exposed skin 20 to 30 minutes *before* going outside so it has time to absorb into your skin. Don't forget your ears and neck. Reapply every two hours—more often if you are perspiring heavily.

Of course, the actual protection provided by a sunscreen depends on a number of variables, including time of day, proximity to the equator, altitude, and degree of cloud cover.

The National Weather Service issues a daily forecast of UV intensity that is included in local weather reports. You can obtain your UV index for the day from the Environmental Protection Agency at www.epa.gov/sunwiselwindex.html by typing in your zip code. A UV index number of four or lower is considered low or minimal; five to six—moderate; seven to nine—high; and 10 or above very high. When possible, schedule your gardening chores for early in the morning or after 4 p.m. when the sun's intensity is much lower, particularly when the UV index is five or above. It's usually cooler and more pleasant to garden then, anyway.

A number of drugs can increase sensitivity to the sun's rays. Certain antibiotics, birth control pills, antidepressants, and antihistamines can increase the risk of sunburn or skin rashes. Consult your doc-

SUN-SENSIBLE ADVICE

To protect yourself from the hazards of UV exposure, the Environmental Protection Agency offers these tips:

- Limit the time spent in the midday sun (between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.).
- Apply a broad spectrum sunscreen rated SPF 15 or higher.
- Wear loose-fitting, sun-protective clothing, including a broad-brimmed hat.
- Wear sunglasses with 99 to 100 percent UVA and UVB protection.



tor or pharmacist about any medication you take with respect to sun exposure.

CLOTHING THAT BLOCKS UV RAYS

Covering up with loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and broad-brimmed hats is a good way to limit UV exposure. But not all fabrics are equal—a bleached cotton T-shirt provides minimal protection—typically SPF 3 to 5—while denim blue jeans offer significant protection. Tightly woven fabrics are generally better than knits. The dyes used to color dark fabrics help absorb UV rays, making them more protective than light-colored fabrics. Other good UV-blocking fabrics include 100 percent polyester, shiny polyester blends, silk with a satin finish, and unbleached cotton. But some of these may be uncomfortably hot.

Clothes designed to shield wearers from UV rays are now available. They are typically made of tightly woven fabrics treated with a UV protective finish. Sun-screening clothes are either rated with the same SPF system as sunscreens or are given a similar “Ultraviolet Protective Factor” (UPF) rating which measures how much of the UV radiation is absorbed by the fabric. A minimum of UPF 15 is suggested by The American Cancer Society. UPF 15 to 24 is considered good; 25 to 39 very good; and UPF 40 to 50 excellent.

Solumbra is a line of sun-protective wear from Sun Precautions® that includes long-sleeved, lightweight shirts,



The Solumbra line of clothing from Sun Precautions protects from head to toe.

Sources

Rit SunGuard, Indianapolis, IN.
www.sunguardsunprotection.com.

Solar Eclipse, Scottsdale, AZ.
www.solareclipse.com.

Sun Clothing, Etc., Fredericksburg, VA.
www.sunclothingetc.com.

Sun Precautions, Everett, WA.
www.sunprecautions.com.

Sun Solutions Clothing, North Falmouth, MA.
www.sunsolutionsclothing.com.

Wallaroo Hat Company, Boulder, CO.
www.wallarohats.com.

pants, and broad-brimmed hats. Because clothing that limits exposure to UV rays is considered a medical device, it is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Sun Precautions has received FDA approval to market its Solumbra line for sun protection with a rating of SPF 30+.

The Wallaroo Hat Company offers vented and non-vented UPF 50+ head toppers in a variety of attractive styles and colors. A minimum three-to four-inch brim is advisable to help shade your face, ears, and neck. (For more sources of solar protective gear, see source list above.)

For an inexpensive way to boost the sun-screening quality of your clothes, treat them with Rit® SunGuard™, a widely available colorless dye that you add to your laundry to increase the UPF rating to 30. One package treats a load of laundry. It works well for cotton, linen, rayon, and silk, and lasts for more than 20 washings. It has received the Skin Cancer Foundation’s Seal of Recommendation.

So go ahead and make hay while the sun shines—plant some seeds and pull some weeds; just take the necessary precautions to protect yourself from those dangerous UV rays.

Rita Pelczar is contributing editor for The American Gardener.

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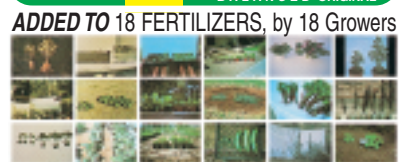
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| ④ FLOWERING | And TO GET MORE FLOWERS, LONGER and MORE BEAUTIFUL |
| ⑤ SEEDLINGS | TO PLANT THEM ALL SAFELY, UNIFORMLY – and GROWING MORE STRONGLY |
| ⑥ TREES TO GET | “TWO YEARS’ GROWTH IN ONE”? |
| ⑦ FRUITING | For EARLIER, HEAVIER, BEARING? |
| ⑧ BULBS | TO START THEM VIGOROUSLY, Beating Soil-rot, Hastening Better BLOOMING |
| ⑨ SEEDS | To Help GERMINATION Percentage and SPEED EARLIER, BETTER YIELDS, including Vegetables |
| ⑩ LAWNS | To Make QUICKER, deeper, TOUGHER TURF from SEED, SOD, Stolons, Sprigs, HYDRO-seeding |
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| 12 REFORESTATION | 18 LANDSCAPING | COMPETITIONS |
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