

# Auger Safety

Tools and equipment used by fruit and vegetable growers are typically smaller and may be different than those used by grain and livestock farmers, but they can still be hazardous. Many beginning growers buy used equipment and tools and may have little experience using small agricultural machinery. This brief is part of a series on safety for fruit and vegetable growers. Developed by the University of Minnesota On-Farm GAPs Education Team. Reviewed by Dr. Jonathan Chaplin, PE.

Augers, or post hole diggers, are labor-saving tools that can help small farmers dig holes for fence posts and trellis supports or for planting trees and shrubs. They can rapidly remove large amounts of soil, making quick work of otherwise labor-intensive jobs.

However, as with any large machinery, safety precautions must be taken when using the post hole digger. Because the auger shaft is rotating rapidly, entanglement or contact with the rotating blades can occur. Always check to be sure shields are in place when operating a post hole digger.

If an auger drills through landscape fabric, the material can twist around the rotating shaft, which can pull the operator in at the same time.



An auger or post hole digger can save time and work. But watch out for fast-rotating blades!

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**For more information on  
Auger Safety**

- Hazards of Post Hole Digger Drilling, Safety and Health Bulletin, OSHA SHIB April 16, 2008
- Operating Powered Post Hole Diggers, Professional Landcare Network PLANET March 2012
- Jensen, RC, Risk Reduction Methods for Occupational Safety and Health, John Wiley & Sons 2012
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## **Before Using a Post Hole Digger**

- Call Gopher State One Call before beginning your project (Minnesota residents only). Phone 800.252.1166 or 651.454.0002
- Read the machine safety manual before starting.
- Locate the shutoff switch.
- Know how the controls operate and how to stop the engine quickly.

## **Using an Auger Safely**

- Never override safety features.
- Check the post hole digger for signs of damage.
- Check the work area for rocks or foreign objects.
- Make sure the handles and gripping areas are dry and in good condition.
- Start the throttle at a slow setting and increase as needed.
- Hold the machine firmly with both hands.
- Turn off the engine, pull out the auger and remove soil every six inches or so. This saves work; it is difficult to pull out of three feet of soil.

- Make sure the hole is straight before you dig too deeply.
- Except for the operator, no one should be near the auger when it is on. Others should keep back 10 feet or more.
- Only operate an auger when there is good visibility and light.
- Do not operate when the ground is wet or slippery.

## **Worker Safety**

- Keep your hands and feet away from all rotating equipment.
- Always wear safety glasses or goggles.
- Wear hearing protection; engine noise from an auger can exceed 90 decibels.
- Do not wear loose fitting jackets, scarves, jewelry, flared or cuffed pants, or anything that could be caught in moving parts.
- Tie back long hair and remove dangling jewelry.
- Keep shoes properly laced and tied.
- Vibration from a post hole digger can cause numbness or tingling in your hands and arms. Exercise your hands and fingers to get blood circulating.



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