

Ladder 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 Food Safety Team. Reviewed by Dr. Jonathan Chaplin, PE.

Orchard ladders, also called tripod ladders, are commonly used for fruit picking and tree pruning. Orchard ladders are not general purpose ladders and should only be used for tree harvesting and pruning tasks. Extension ladders and step ladders are often used to reach equipment or upper areas of buildings.

With proper use, ladders are indispensable tools on the farm. However, misuse or disregard for safety practices can result in injury.

The main cause of falls from straight or extension ladders is sliding of the ladder base. For self-supported ladders or stepladders, the main cause is tipping sideways.

Orchard ladder injuries are caused by falling from ladders, toppling ladders, or from being poked or hit by branches. Back injuries can occur from carrying ladders.



Orchard ladders should only be used for tree harvesting and pruning tasks. They should be set on soft ground.

**For more information on
Ladder Safety**

- Ladders, Lifting and Falls Bulletin 2326, Maine Farm Safety Program
- Orchard Ladder Safety, 2005, UC Davis Ag Safety Program
- Tripod Orchard Ladder Safety, Oregon State University
- Orchard Ladder Safety, Tailgate Safety Training, Ohio State University

Ladder Safety

Before Using a Ladder

- Check for cracked and broken rungs, missing or loose rivets, bent rails or wobbly legs.
- Make sure all the joints between steps, rungs, and rails are tight.
- Never use a damaged ladder.
- Do not use ladders on windy days.
- Use the correct length and weight ladder for the picker and the tree.

Using a Ladder Safely

- Provide solid footing on soft ground to prevent the ladder from sinking.
- Place the ladder on a substantial and level base, not on movable objects.
- Do not stand on the top three rungs of a straight or orchard ladder.
- Do not stand on the top two rungs of a step ladder.
- Do not stand on a step ladder paint shelf.
- Set ladders one foot out for every four feet up.
- Do not lean sideways past the rails.
- Face the ladder at all times when working from the ladder.

- Never lean a ladder against unsafe backing, such as loose boxes or barrels.
- Do not jump from ladders.

Orchard Ladder Safety

- Orchard ladders are designed to be used on soft and uneven ground. They are not general purpose ladders.
- Do not use orchard ladders on concrete or asphalt surfaces.
- Do not step off a ladder on to branches of trees.

Worker Safety

- Wear a hat, eye protection, long sleeved shirt, long pants and gloves. Avoid wearing loose fitting clothes.
- Always wear sturdy shoes or boots. Shoes with a stiff sole will be more comfortable. Shoes with heels will keep your foot from slipping through the step.
- Do not over-reach for fruit, move the ladder instead.
- Take work breaks and drink plenty of water, especially on hot days.



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