

# SKIN CANCER AND THE HORTICULTURE WORKFORCE

Survey of awareness and  
attitudes to sun safety

# Welcome

Over 17,000 cases of melanoma skin cancer are reported every year, according to Cancer Research UK 86% of these cases are preventable. Gardeners, Growers, Landscapers and those working outdoors with a high exposure to UV radiation are amongst the most at risk.

This survey attempts to assess the current knowledge of skin cancer of those working in the horticulture sector, and gather insights on attitudes towards sun-safe preventative measures and the barriers to their use.

## Key Findings:

- **12% of 718 respondents had been diagnosed with some form of skin cancer, of which, men were nearly twice as likely to have been diagnosed than women.**
- **Skin cancer diagnosis was most prevalent in respondents that reported the fairest/palest skin tone.**
- **A majority of respondents (71%) reported being sunburned at least once per year.**
- **Women are much more likely to wear sunscreen regularly with 74% claiming to wear sunscreen 'always' or 'most of the time' compared to only 39% of men.**
- **30% of sunscreen users reported 'rarely' or 'never' reapplying sunscreen whilst working outdoors during the day.**
- **87% of respondents agreed that sunscreen should be exempt from VAT with 92% saying they would be more likely to use sunscreen regularly if it was 20% cheaper**
- **90% would seek medical advice if worried about a mole or skin lesion. A small number were worried about being able to make a GP appointment or burdening the health service.**
- **Employers with more than 250 employees were more than twice as likely to regularly provide sunscreen for employees than smaller employers.**

## About the survey

The questions used in this survey were based on those commissioned by Melanoma Focus and conducted by external market research companies. The sample in this survey was self selecting, recruited by either direct e-mailshot to members of the Chartered Institute of Horticulture, PlantNetwork, BALI or by social media from horticulture industry specific groups, or promoted by the Horticulture trade press and other professional organisations.

The survey was conducted between February 1<sup>st</sup> and March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2025.  
A total number of 718 respondents completed the survey.

This report has been prepared by Jason Daff CHort MCIHort, on behalf of the Chartered Institute of Horticulture.

# Skin Cancer Diagnosis and Risk Factors

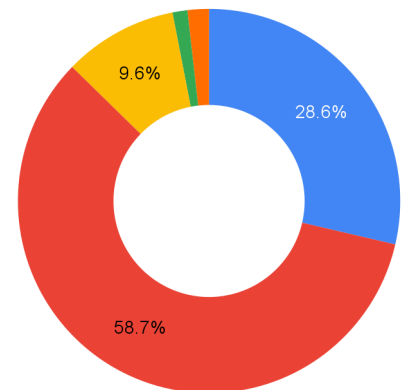
**A majority of respondents (71%) reported being sunburned at least once per year.**

Similar proportions of male (31%) and female (27%) respondents reported 'never' being sunburned.

Men (5%) were more likely to report being burned more than 5 times per year than women (2%).

**How often do you get sunburned per year, on average?**

- Never
- 1 - 2 times
- 3 - 5 times
- 6 - 10 times
- > 10 times



**12% of respondents had been diagnosed with some form of skin cancer**







**Men were nearly twice as likely to have been diagnosed than women**

**82 respondents (12%) reported being previously diagnosed with some form of skin cancer.**

The most frequent cancer types being Basal Cell Carcinoma: 34, Melanoma: 25 and Squamous Cell Carcinoma: 9, some respondents reported a diagnosis but could not recall which specific type (14).

**Men (17%) were almost twice as likely to report being diagnosed with skin cancer than women (9%).**

**How would you describe your skin tone as per the Fitzpatrick Scale?**

					
Type I	Type II	Type III	Type IV	Type V	Type VI
Light, Pale White	White, Fair	Medium White to Olive	Olive Tone	Light Brown	Dark Brown
Always burns, never tans	Usually burns, tans with difficulty	Sometimes mild burn, gradually tans to olive	Rarely burns, tans with ease to moderate brown	Very rarely burns, tans very easily	Never burns, tans very easily, deeply pigmented
12.1% (87)	49.1% (352)	32.2% (323)	5.4% (39)	0.8% (6)	0.3% (2)

The majority of respondents identified their skin tone as Type II (49%), followed by Type III (32%). **Skin cancer was diagnosed in respondents with skin tone Types I through IV. However, the prevalence of skin cancer for Type I respondents was double that of Types II, III or IV.**

**93% (670) reported being sunburned as a child or teenager,** of which 372 recalled being severely burned (resulting in blistering) at least once. 115 respondents reported 5 or more severe sunburn incidents in childhood.

**75% Think that cases of melanoma skin cancer are increasing in the UK**

# Attitudes to Sun Safety

Male and female respondents showed similar behaviours towards covering-up and wearing hats as sun protection: 61% of men and 56% of women reported to 'always' or 'most of the time' taking these precautions.

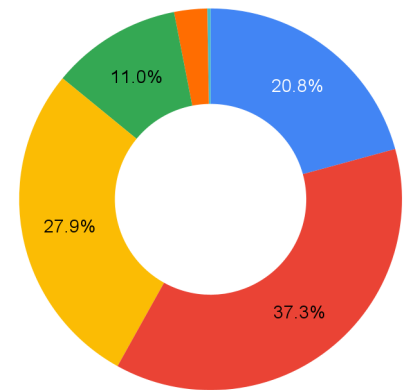
Similarly, 12% of men and 14% of women claimed to 'rarely' or 'never' wear a hat or cover-up.

Larger differences were observed when respondents were asked about wearing sunscreen between May and September.

**74% of women claimed to wear sunscreen 'always' or 'most of the time' whilst only 39% of men reported the same.** Likewise, men were three times more likely to 'rarely' or 'never' wear sunscreen compared to women (men 23% vs women 7%).

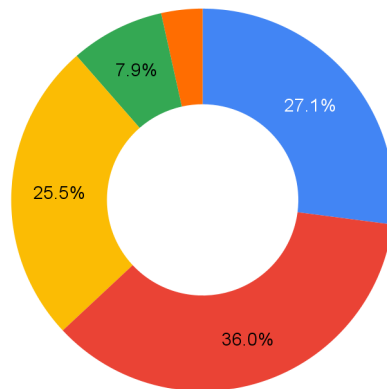
## Do you cover up/wear a hat when working outdoors?

- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Prefer not to say



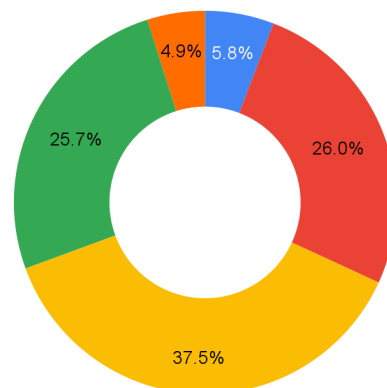
## How often do you wear sunscreen from May to September?

- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never



## When working outdoors, do you reapply the sunscreen?

- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never



**30% of sunscreen users reported 'rarely' or 'never' reapplying sunscreen whilst working outdoors.** Male and female sunscreen users showed similar attitudes towards reapplying sunscreen during the day.

## The Cost of Sunscreen

50% (358) of respondents thought that sunscreen was too expensive in the UK and Ireland.

87% (621) of respondents agreed that sunscreen should be exempt from VAT.

92% (649) said they would be more likely to use sunscreen regularly if it was 20% cheaper.

## Top 5 barriers to using sunscreen:

(According to respondents who do not wear sunscreen)

1. "I do not expect to burn " (36%)
2. "Sunscreen is too messy / unpleasant to wear " (26%)
3. "I often forget to apply sunscreen " (23%)
4. "I like to tan " (22%)
5. "I cannot be bothered to apply sunscreen every day " (20%)

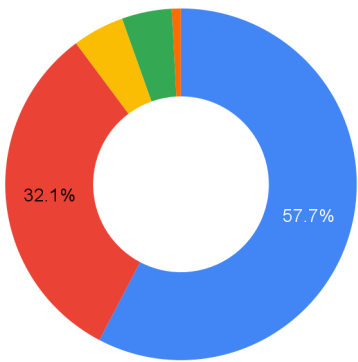
# Recognising Skin Cancer Symptoms

**90% of respondents would be 'somewhat likely' or 'very likely' to seek medical advice about a mole or lesion.** However, 5.4% reported being 'somewhat unlikely' or 'very unlikely'; the response was the same for men and women.

When asked about checking moles, 18% (127) of respondents reported not checking their moles for changes. 69% checked their own moles, and 28% said their partner checked for them.

How likely would you be to seek medical advice about a mole or a lesion?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neither likely or unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely



## Respondents identified these symptoms of melanoma skin cancer:

- A change in an existing mole or lesion. (95%)
- A new, unusual-looking area of skin, there for over a month. (89%)
- A mole that has an uneven edge. (82%)
- Itchy skin. (47%)
- An unexplained rash. (31%)
- Feeling very tired and weak. (26%)
- Unexpected weight loss. (24%)

## Respondents reported barriers to seeking medical advice:

1. "I cannot get an appointment with my GP " (41%)
2. "I would not want to burden the health service " (18%)
3. "I would not be concerned that it was serious " (10%)

# Sunscreen Provision by Employers

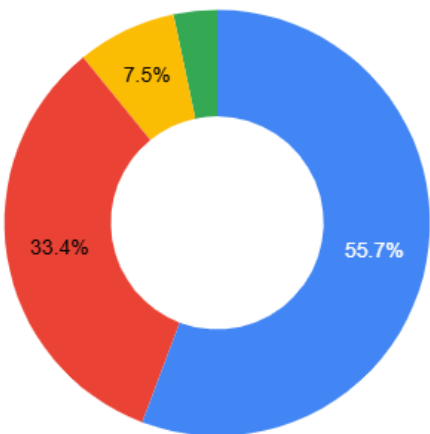
A correlation was observed between the size of employer and the provision of sunscreen for employees.

**Employers with more than 250 employees were more than twice as likely to regularly provide sunscreen for employees than smaller employers.**

Employers who provide sunscreen by size	
> 250 employees	70%
50 - 249 employees	46%
6 - 49 employees	44%
5 or fewer employees	33%

Does your employer regularly provide sunscreen for employees?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- NA



# Demographic Results

Total number of respondents: 718

Men: 205  
Women: 504  
Other: 3  
Prefer not to say: 4

Location	Count	%
Scotland	56	7.8
Ireland & Northern Ireland	14	2
Wales	30	4.2
East of England	66	9.2
Yorkshire & Humber	58	8.1
East Midlands	32	4.5
West Midlands	28	3.9
Greater London	72	10.1
North East	10	1.4
North West	38	5.3
South East	195	27.3
South West	116	16.2

Age Range	Count	%
18-25	22	3.1
26-35	76	10.6
36-45	146	20.4
46-55	247	34.5
56-65	184	25.7
>65	41	5.7

## Horticulture Sector

Advisory & Consultancy: 26  
Arboriculture: 2  
Botanic Garden: 117  
Education: 27  
Garden Design: 99  
Garden Retail: 17  
Greenspace Management: 63  
Journalism: 1  
Landscaping: 50  
Ornamental & Amenity: 215  
Production (Food): 21  
Production (Non-food crops): 16  
Research: 11  
Social & Therapeutic Horticulture: 29  
Unknown: 8

## Employment Status

Employed 46.2% 332  
Self Employed 45.7% 329  
Student 4.2% 30  
Retired 2.4% 17  
Other 1.5%

Type and Size of Employer		
Number of Staff	Employed	Self Employed
> 250	159	0
50 - 249	46	0
6 - 49	85	6
5 or fewer	42	44
Sole Trader	0	279
Totals	332	329