

# Helpful Hints for Pain-free Gardening

## Feel Great While Gardening

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Mindful gardening = boosts bone density  
Reduces calories, lots of different muscles used.

- Enjoy the start of gardening activities with a cup of coffee or tea, smell the roses, and listen to the birds.
- An hour of gardening can reduce stress, boost bone density, and burn calories. But all that bending, squatting, raking, and lifting can challenge muscles as much as any competitive sport.
- Adjust your expectations / break up tasks in a priority order for your body.
- You may find that different times of day may work better for you than others:
  - Morning- cooler
  - Evening – may be better for people with arthritis
- Think of your body as another gardening tool  
Know your body: Where are your trigger spots?  
What equipt. will help you.

### GET READY:

- Take a brisk five-minute walk to get your heart pumping and muscles ready to move.
- Recommend doing very gentle stretches but first make sure they are cleared by your doctor.
  - Stretching helps you work more comfortably since it increases flexibility and range of motion in your joints. Movements are slow and do not go into the pain range. Do not hold your breath while you are performing these stretches. Keep your eyes open. = to not get dizzy
  - Do stretches before, during and after gardening breaks

Neck: 3x

- *Shoulder shrugs*: To do the shrugs correctly, you slowly raise your shoulders toward your ears as far as you can without straining (you can do this while standing or seated). The upward movement should take about five seconds, so don't rush through it. Then let your shoulders slowly lower to their neutral position. Do three shrugs, making sure that you relax completely between each repetition.
- *Shoulder circles*: Make a circle with your shoulders by slowly moving them forward, raising them up toward your ears, pushing them back, and then moving them down to the starting position. Do this three times in the forward direction and three times going backward.
- *Neck half-circle*: You can do this stretch while standing or sitting in a sturdy chair. Keep your feet flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart. Slowly turn your head to the right until you feel a slight stretch. Be careful not to tip or tilt your head forward or backward, but hold it in a comfortable position. Hold the position for five seconds. Turn your head to the left and hold the position for five seconds. Repeat three times.
- *Head Roll*: Slowly lower your left ear toward your left shoulder. Then lower your chin to roll your head down to the center and slowly to the right ear to your right shoulder. Then slowly move back in the same fashion. The key is not to jerk your neck, rather move it with a slow rhythm. **Do not roll your head backwards as this puts stress on the disks in your spine.** Perform three times.

### Leg stretch

- Holding on to the countertop, wall or a chair. Place one leg in front of your body. Tilt forward from your hips with a flat back -- between 20 and 40 degrees or to the point of tension in your calf and hamstring. Hold the stretch for 15 seconds and repeat with your other leg.

## Back Stretches

Get close to what you need to work on.  
\* Keep your back as flat as possible when reaching to garden.

Since so much of gardening puts us in a hunched position, it is good to go slowly into the opposite direction with these exercises.

- *The "seventh-inning stretch"*: While standing with feet at shoulder width, place your palms near the base of the spine to ensure that you're not bending back too far. Stick chest out and take a deep breath. Slowly release. Do three deep breaths, slowly, with no discomfort.
- *Side stretch*: Sit or stand with feet together and knees slightly bent. You can also hold on to a chair or countertop for support. Begin with left hand on hip and extend right arm overhead in line with your ear. Lean to the left and slowly reach to the left with your right arm. Hold stomach in to keep the body in line. Hold for five seconds. Repeat on right side. Repeat three each side.
- *Chest stretch*: With your feet comfortably apart and your hands resting on your waist, slowly press your elbows back bringing them as close together behind you as you can without straining. If you do this simple movement correctly and slowly, you will feel a stretch across your chest and a contraction between your shoulder blades. Repeat three times.

## Hands and wrist

- *Traffic cop*: Reach arms straight out in front of you at shoulder-height with palms facing the ground. Using your left hand, gently pull the fingers of the right hand up and toward the body, opening the palm so that it's in a traffic cop position. Then pull the fingers of your right hand down and toward the body (so your palm is facing your body). Then do both stretches on your other hand.
- *Circles*: Circling your wrists slowly in each direction to loosen them up.
- *Rag doll*: To avoid stress on your wrists, periodically let them go floppy and limp at your sides. Give them a good shaking.
- *Thumb touches*: For your fingers, spread them apart as much as you can, keeping them as straight as possible. Keeping them spread, make three circles in both directions with your thumbs. Then touch your thumb to each finger in turn, forming a round circle with your fingers.

## Helpful Hints for Gardening

Don't jump right in / plan your gardening tasks.

**ASK YOURSELF THIS QUESTION:** *What is my No. 1 goal for today?*

- Prioritize your tasks and do just one task each day
- This will help you avoid fatigue while giving you the satisfaction of completing a gardening activity.
- Break up your gardening chores into smaller jobs that you can do throughout the day or over several days.

### **SET ATTAINABLE GOALS**

- Set modest goals for each day and assess both your progress and how you are feeling

### **PACE YOURSELF**

- You will work longer and stronger if you go at a slow, steady pace for short periods of time than if you push yourself to finish a big project.

### **TAKE BREAKS**

- Do not garden for longer than 20-30 minutes before taking a 5-minute break to stretch, sit down and drink some water.
- It's easy to lose track of time when you love being out in the yard, so set your phone timer for 30 minutes.

### **HAVE A SEAT**

- Place chairs in the shade around your garden so you are reminded to relax.

### **SWITCH TASKS**

- Regular changes in body posture can prevent pain during gardening work.
- Avoid doing the same kind of job for a long period. Switch to something else for a while.

## STAY HYDRATED

- Did you know that not drinking enough water can make joint pain worse?
- Take a water bottle with you as a reminder to take frequent breaks and hydrate.

## BRING THE GARDEN TO YOU

- A raised garden at waist height makes it easier to care for your plants. Keeping the bed narrow (four feet wide at most) reduces the need to reach.
- Wall gardening, also called vertical gardening, is a trend of planting up, not across the ground.
- Try container garden. Choose lightweight containers for planting, and place them on wheeled bases to make them easier to move around. You can also place planters on railings, shelves, or another elevated surface to reduce your need to bend. To keep the weight of plant containers lighter and easier to manage, make the potting soil less dense with additives such as rice hulls, vermiculite, or perlite. If your pots are big- place plastic peanuts or other light-weight material in the bottom.

## PROTECT YOUR KNEES

- Remember to weed while kneeling, not by standing and bending at the waist
- Use a wheeled chair or "scoot seat" designed for garden use. Test drive one if possible.
- Position your seat close to the area where you are working.
- Sit on a bucket or stool.
- Get support from kneeler seats. Heavy-duty kneeler seats, especially those with raised, padded handles to help you get up and down, allowing you to use your arm strength to aid in the process. Many kneelers also convert to a low chair.
- Use knee cushions or knee pads. Knee pads are devices you strap to each knee so that when you kneel, your knees are cushioned. These can make walking and getting up difficult. Buy ones that fit snugly, feel firm yet are flexible.
- Use long-handled tools to avoid kneeling, bending, or squatting. Long-handled tools include rakes, shovels, cultivators, hoes, edgers, grass sheers,

weed pullers, bulb planters, and trowels. Telescoping tools are especially handy when you have tasks to do at both ground level and in raised beds.

## PROTECT YOUR BACK

- Prolonged flexion of the spine can strain the ligaments, muscles, and even the discs that separate the vertebrae, all of which can cause pain.
- Be conscious of the twisting motion that can be produced when throwing mulch or shoveling soil as it can cause back strain.
- Remember the key concept is to keep your back straight.
- If you're lifting a heavy object—a box of plants or soil, say—you should squat (bend the knees only), keeping your back straight, and grasp the object with both hands (handles work well). Make sure you're lifting close to your body as you straighten your knees. You can also put one knee down and bend the other in order to avoid bending forward. If you need to put the object down nearby, pivot your whole body, including hips and legs. Twisting only the upper body, especially while forward bending, causes the most torque, and thus pressure, on the lumbar discs.
- To minimize lifting, use a wagon, a dolly, or other aid to carry heavy items from place to place.
- Fill large watering cans just halfway, and consider alternative watering options, such as soaker hoses or automated irrigation systems
- Use long-handled tools to avoid kneeling, bending, or squatting.
- Shoveling: Stay in alignment (starting with being mindful of the direction in which your shovel is facing.) As much as possible, lean your weight rather than muscle with your arms. Move your whole body when dumping the dirt out of the shovel. In other words, while it may seem easier to simply twist your body, this is not easier on your spine. It takes mindfulness to walk around in a quarter or half circle and then release the dirt.

## WEED RIGHT OR DON'T WEED AT ALL

- Sit, squat or kneel to get to the ground level rather than bending over.
- Keep your movements smooth and avoid any sudden twisting or reaching motions
- Wet soil or weed shortly after rain

- If you have to lean forward to grab a weed, keep your back straight and bend at the hip joint.
- Mulch generously to discourage weeds. The mulch will also keep in moisture, so you won't need to spend as much time watering. Place mulch three inches deep around the areas of your garden.

## KEEP TOOLS IN GOOD CONDITION

- Keep tools sharp
- Wash off the soil before storing

## WATERING

- Trying to get water to the root of plants can involve a lot of bending over and watering hanging baskets means raising your shoulder, all of which can cause pain. To help with these issues, use a long armed watering wands.
- When lifting watering cans: bend your knees slightly. Keep your back straight and use your legs.
- Use soaker hoses or a sprinkler system for irrigation.

*lets water to roots better*

**TAKE BREAKS.** Don't continue raking or pulling weeds until the job is finished. Stop and take a break.

## PROTECT YOUR HANDS WITH GLOVES

- Invest in a good pair of gloves. As we age, our skin becomes thinner, making us more prone to scrapes and tears, so it's important to protect your hands as you work in the garden. You'll want a good pair of gardening gloves that not only offer protection from the cold but also cushion joints. Gripping gloves come with elastic band to maintain the grip.
- If you have arthritis in your thumbs or fingers, or carpal tunnel, wear splints to protect these joints.

*Nitral gloves by Atlas = good for fine-motor tasks.*

## TRY OUT SPECIALIZED TOOLS

- Think light and wide. Use tools that are lightweight with handles that are wide and long, which makes them easier to hold. Long-handled tools can eliminate much of the bending required by planting and weeding.
- If pain in your hands and fingers makes gardening uncomfortable, use chopsticks to easily open holes for seeds and transplants. For all kinds of pruning jobs, get lightweight ratchet tools, which increase pressure on branches and limbs with no more effort from you.
- Buy gardening tools with bigger handles. You can find tools geared for people with arthritis in almost any gardening catalogue. As an alternative, if you don't want to replace your tools, tightly wrap pipe insulation around the handles to make them thicker and easier to handle.
- Go electric. Instead of using manual shears to prune and trim, opt for an electric pair so you don't have to go through the repetitive motion of cutting through tough brush. Be aware that using vibrating tools can be a catch 22. A little vibration can be soothing, but if you work too long with tools that vibrate, you can aggravate arthritis symptoms.
- Fiberglass handles are lighter weight.
- Spray paint tools orange or use an apron/bucket to store them.
- Wrist problems – try to keep your hand in a neutral position

*Neutron brand = lightweight weed wacker*

## RESPECT AND LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

- Your inner 18-year-old wants to work through the pain, but that's not a good approach. Pain signals are the only way our body can tell us to stop.
- Let your body pick the pace. We accomplish more when we respond to our body's pain signals by slowing down or even stopping. Conserve your energy by switching positions, taking breaks to sit down or stretching for a few minutes.

## NEXT YEAR'S GARDEN

- Choose your plants wisely. Choose low maintenance plants. Planting perennials rather than annuals can translate to less work each season because they come back for several years. Also, avoid high-maintenance plants that require a lot of pruning or attention. Spring flowering bulbs such as daffodils are good due to their lack of care once planted.
- Add dwarf flowering shrubs to flower beds. An easy way to add color.
- Position high-maintenance plants closer to your water source and where you store your tools.
- Instead of a traditional flowerbed, try gardening in containers or raised flower beds. This reduces stooping, kneeling and squatting.
- Be a flexible gardener. Once you understand your strengths and limitations, you can choose the gardening option that makes sense for you — both in terms of physical abilities and logistical constraints.

*To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow.*

*Audrey Hepburn*

Google:

Strawbale gardening = raised beds