

TEXAS GARDENER'S SEEDS

FROM OUR GARDEN TO YOURS™

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Garden your way to better health

By Melinda Myers

Break out the tools and garden your way to a healthier mind, body and spirit. Gardeners know and research proves that getting outdoors, digging in the soil and gardening help strengthen muscles, increase flexibility, reduce stress and elevate our mood.

Include gardening as a major component of your workout schedule. You'll stretch and strengthen muscles while promoting cardiovascular health and maintaining bone mass. A University of Arkansas study found that yard work as well as weight training significantly maintained bone density in women over 50.

And for those trying to lose weight, add 30 minutes of gardening to your daily or weekly routine to help shed some extra pounds. A half hour of raking burns 162 calories, weeding 182, and turning the compost pile a whopping 250. Gardening several times per week will help keep you and your landscape looking top notch.

Don't let a lack of time, space or painful joints stop you from growing nutritious vegetables, beautiful flowers or an attractive landscape. Staying active through gardening not only increases flexibility and strengthens muscles, it helps fight anxiety and depression that arthritis sufferers and others often experience.

Those struggling with limited time, space or mobility may want to try container and elevated gardening. Both can be placed on patios, decks or balconies. Select a size and style you can easily reach and one that matches your garden design. Those on a tight budget can add drainage holes and paint 5-gallon food grade containers or nursery pots to create attractive planters.



Gardening helps fight anxiety and depression while providing plenty of fresh-from-the-garden produce. (Photo courtesy of FoxGlovesInc.com)

Protect and support your hands with gloves that fit and provide support. Padding and reinforced fingertips protect your hands and knuckles from scrapes and bruises. Gloves with long cuffs or those that extend to the elbow provide added protection when working in the garden.

Select gloves that are machine washable, so you always have a clean pair ready when you venture out to the garden. Keep a pair of gloves, pruner and your favorite weeding tool in a bucket near the front or back door. You won't waste time looking for your favorite tools plus you can take advantage of those small blocks of time to weed, deadhead or pick a bouquet of flowers to enjoy.

Enlist the help of ergonomic tools that allow you to garden longer with less pain and fatigue. Look for designs that keep your back and wrist straight when digging, pruning and raking. Select tools with soft wide grips to further reduce hand fatigue. Wrap the handles of existing tools with foam pipe insulation for added padding.

Protect your joints and muscles while gardening. Warm up, just as you would for any workout, with a few simple stretches. Protect your knees by using a stool, kneeling pad or one-legged kneel instead of squatting.

Take regular breaks. Gardening in twenty-minute intervals and resting in between to enjoy your handiwork and hydrate will pay off with less muscle strain and fatigue. You'll then be ready for your next workout session in the garden that will invigorate your mind, body and spirit.

Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including Small Space Gardening. She hosts The Great Courses "How to Grow Anything" gardening DVD series and the nationally syndicated Melinda's Garden Moment TV & radio segments. Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for Birds & Blooms. Myers' web site is www.melindamyers.com.