

Often when we speak of “enabling” someone, we mean it negatively, but not when it comes to gardeners! Universal Design (UD) is the concept that “all environments and products to the greatest extent possible, are usable by everyone regardless of their age, ability, or circumstance.” ([The Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University](#)) Applying UD to gardening includes, but is not limited to making pathways suitable for people using wheelchairs and other mobility aids, providing Braille signage, and designing tools scaled to the size and abilities of users. Since this is the time of year for gift giving, this article will focus on tools you might want to give to a gardening friend or consider for your own wish list to make gardening more approachable and fun.

Ergonomic tools should help the user:

- “bend” the tool, not the wrist; use tools with angled or “bent” handles, when appropriate.
- reduce excessive gripping force or pressure.
- avoid extreme and awkward joint positions.
- avoid twisting hand and wrist motion by using power tools rather than hand tools.
- reduce or avoid repetitive finger movements.
- limit vibration.
- minimize the amount of force needed to activate trigger devices.

[Maine AgrAbility](#) helps farmers and gardeners overcome limitations due to age, injury, pain and other physical issues. More tools and resources can be found by exploring their website, as well as [The Toolbox - National AgrAbility Project](#).

When selecting hand tools for digging, weeding, etc., look for tools that keep the hand and wrist in a neutral position, have cushioned grips, and are lightweight. Examples:

- [Natural Radius Grip](#)
- [Fist Grip Tools](#)
- [Yarden Tools](#)
- [Easi-Grip](#)

Pruners, loppers, and other cutting tools may have longer handles for better leverage, ratcheting mechanisms, or other adaptations. Examples:

- [Florian Tools](#)
- [Fiskars Powergear](#)
- [Felco 8 Pruner](#)

Properly sized and proportioned tools can make all the difference in the garden. [Green Heron HER tools](#) (shovel/spade and garden fork) were designed by and for women, considering women’s generally smaller stature and lower center of gravity.

While youth is not usually considered a limitation, having quality tools of the correct size can enhance a child's experience of gardening. Examples:

- [For Small Hands](#)
- [Magic Cabin](#)
- [Bella Luna](#)

Getting close to the ground can be hard on the body, especially the lower back. Sitting, squatting, and kneeling may be challenging as well, but there are ways to make it easier. Examples:

- [Vertex Garden Rocker](#)
- [Vertex Kneeler/Bench](#)
- [Deep Seat Garden Kneeler](#)

Another option is to convert existing tools with angled and/or cushioned handles, grips, or support cuffs. Examples:

- [Easi-Grip Add-On Handles](#)
- [RoboHandle Ergonomic Tool Adapter](#)
- [Add-A-Handle](#)
- [Back-Saver Grip](#)
- [Motus Grips](#)

Adaptive tools and assistive technology make activities more accessible and are great gifts. Sharing joy is what holiday gift-giving is all about. Happy holidays, and keep in mind that presents are no replacement for presence!

[Please note the tools and websites listed are provided purely for educational purposes. No responsibility is assumed for any problems associated with the use of products or services mentioned in this article. No endorsement of products or companies is intended, nor is criticism of unnamed products or companies implied.]



