

Healthy Gardening Tips



Gardening, America's number one outdoor leisure activity, can be difficult if a person has health conditions that limit movement or stamina. But there are ways to decrease the aches, pains, and strains that often occur during gardening.

Occupational therapy is a profession that helps people engage in "occupations," like gardening, that make our lives more meaningful. The following tips are offered to make gardening easier and more comfortable even if you have physical limitations.

- **Protect your joints**—Choose implements with padded handles to protect joints in your hands and fingers from excess pressure. Tools like shears or clippers with a spring-action self-opening feature are helpful if you have weak grasp.
- **Conserve energy**—Sit while working to conserve energy and decrease stress on your back, knees, and hips. Use a kneeler seat, a combination kneeling platform and seat that helps you rise from a kneeling to a seated position. Take rest breaks, and stop work before you become overtired.
- **Limit lifting**—Watch out for those heavy bags of soil, mulch, or fertilizer. Instead of moving the whole bag, divide it into smaller, more manageable loads and use a cart or wagon to move materials. When lifting, use the muscles in your legs, and not your back, for the heaviest exertions. Ask for help, or hire it, if necessary, for heavier tasks.
- **Think small**—Start with a small garden area that you can manage without excess exertion. Locate it near your house and the water supply to reduce hauling long lengths of hose. New lightweight hoses and coiled hoses are available and produce less stress and wear on your body.
- **Mix it up**—Vary your tasks to avoid overstressing any one part of your body. Change your position frequently to keep from becoming stiff. Tightly gripping or pinching a tool for extended periods can cause swelling in the hands and arms, and hunching over or kneeling for prolonged periods can cause back strain and knee pain.

Need more information?

Occupational therapy practitioners are available through most hospitals, medical centers, and clinics. They have expertise in helping people engage in activities in ways that are healthier and safer. Contact your family physi-

cian or other local health officials for more information about how occupational therapy can help you or someone you know live better.

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