



## Ergonomic garden tools

Gardening requires a little work, but it should not be exhausting, and it certainly should not be painful. Much as some of us hate to admit it, we are not necessarily as limber as we think we are, or were at one time. This does not mean that we are decrepit, only that our joints need a little protection. Growing plants in raised beds is one sure way to save on gardener's back or knee ache. When the soil is at the right level, it requires considerably less bending and awkward twisting to get tasty vegetables and lovely flowers. Even with the help that a raised garden provides however, we may still want a little more assistance.

How often does the intrepid gardener need to put down a trowel or other implement because her or his arm has started to cramp and hurt? It happens too often, especially when that tool must be held at an unnatural angle. Digging or pruning with some tools can cause us to work against ourselves.

Fortunately, there are several adaptations that have made using gardening tools much easier. Ergonomics is the study of interactions between people and the things they use, creating a good "fit" between a person and a chair, or a computer keyboard, or a pruner. Some authorities use the terms "ergonomics" and "human factors" interchangeably. Anyone who has a padded mouse pad is already acquainted with ergonomic design.

Several different types of hand tools are available. The first and most noticeable element is a change in the handle. Ergonomic handles are frequently large, and may have extra padding and non-slip grips. Large padded handles reduce strain and cramping. Handles may also appear curved. This curve helps by keeping the wrist and hand at a more natural angle.

Padded handles are not the only improvement. A ratcheting pruner, for instance, is a very good idea when a branch is too thick for a simple pruner but too thin to bother taking out the saw to do the job.

Some firms offer arm adapters that attach to other equipment, so they can become ergonomic.

New designs for long handled implements make them easier. Some rakes have a curved handle that diminishes the need to bend over to pull up leaves or grass. Others have an additional side handle that makes the job even easier. Yet another different design has a pivoting head, so it is possible to select the best angle for the task at hand. A telescoping handle permits a gardener to find just the right working length.

Even the blade on a hoe can help reduce stress. Circular hoes have one sharp edge, so the dull edge can push away tender material. Stirrup (hula) hoes have two sharp edges, hence they will cut through weeds and soil either by pushing or pulling.

There is no one single design element that makes a tool "ergonomic", but no matter what the variation is, it can help make gardening a bit more comfortable for any of us.

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