

Gardening as we mature

Preventing injuries in the garden is important. Although we normally think of raising flowers, fruits and vegetables as a “leisure activity,” gardening does require a certain amount of work. It can be surprising to discover that one has become less flexible over the years. Making sure we are working in the safest way is not difficult or intrusive, but we often forget about taking care of ourselves.

In an ordinary day, there is so much a gardener might do: bend, dig, haul, kneel, mix, plant, prune, pull, rake, scout, twist and water. Any one of these could be unpleasant if the end product – a wonderful garden – were not the goal. Any one of them could also be unpleasant if it caused an injury. There are a few things that can help to avoid getting hurt.

Some gentle stretches can help warm up muscles before getting started. Gentle stretches are significantly less strenuous than those you do in the gym, but they are enough.

It might not seem that carrying a bag of soil or fertilizer is so difficult, but those bags can be heavy. Is it necessary to buy them in 50-pound weights? Buying in bulk is usually less expensive; still, it might be a false economy if moving them can hurt tender joints or muscles. If it is necessary to carry something heavy, remember that your legs are strong. Use those thigh muscles when lifting anything heavy and try to hold it as close as you can. Avoid bending at the waist. Try bending knees instead.

Asking for help is not a sign of weakness or old age; it is an indication that we are in tune with our bodies and smart enough to know our limitations.

Gardening does require repetitive motions. If possible, alternate any tasks that require a lot of the same repeating actions with other tasks that use a different set of muscles every 20 minutes or so.

At times, the simplest actions can cause the biggest problems. Watering is an example. Although irrigation systems are installed in most yards, there are occasions when a plant needs to be hand-watered. Water weighs 8.8 pounds per gallon. A two gallon watering can weighs 17.6 pounds plus the weight of the can itself. A smaller can might save some strain. Is the hose so heavy-duty that it is difficult to negotiate? There are many lighter ones available. They would not be practical for a professional landscaper, but for a home gardener they are just fine.

When moving tools, plants, or implements, you might consider using a cart rather than a wheelbarrow. Four wheels give far more stability, which lessens the risk of getting hurt. Garden



carts can be costly, however. Perhaps there is a red wagon, the kind most children receive, left unused in the garage. Put that toy to work!

It is also possible to adapt your tools to make them easier to use. In addition, there are many ergonomic garden tools that are available online, or even at some local home stores.

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