

GARDENING AND YOUR HEALTH

HUMBER NURSERIES 'GREEN THUMB GUIDE'



Gardening as Exercise

Did you know that gardening burns about the same number of calories as low impact aerobics (approximately 400 calories per hour)? Not often thought of in terms of exercise, gardening can be a great way to stay fit. Due to the strain gardening can put on your body, you should consult with your doctor before starting. Gardening uses most of the major muscle groups, so warming up and stretching is also advisable.

Research shows that 30 minutes of moderate exercise lowers blood pressure and cholesterol levels, helps prevent diabetes and heart disease, and prevents or slows osteoporosis.

If you aren't able to do 30 minutes continuously, you can achieve almost the same benefits by doing 3 - 10 minute sessions throughout the day, as long as you are working at a moderate level and elevating your heart rate.

Tips for Maximizing the Health Benefits

- **Vary your activities.** Break up more strenuous activities with lighter tasks to avoid injury.
- **Listen to your body.** It will tell you if you are overdoing it; you just need to pay attention to the signs and remember to take regular breaks.
- **Keep track of your time.** Gradually build up the amount of time you spend gardening, with a goal of at least 30 minutes in total.
- **Save your back.** Be careful to keep your back straight and bend with your knees when lifting. Avoid bending over from the waist to weed, prune, etc.
- **Do heavy work only after warming up.** Things like digging holes and turning over soil or compost should only be done after your body has sufficiently warmed up. Taking 5 minutes to get warmed up before strenuous gardening reduces the chance of injury.
- **Remember to stretch afterwards.** Taking 5 to 10 minutes to stretch when you finish will help prevent injury and reduce stiffness the following day.

Other possible benefits of gardening

- Gardening reconnects you with people, your community and nature. This, in combination with reduced stress, provides a psychological benefit.
- By growing and eating fruits and vegetables, you improve your diet and can avoid or reduce the use of pesticides.
- A well maintained yard increases the value of your home.
- Introducing children to the outdoors and the joy of nature can lead to fun family activities. See below for more information.
- Adding a pond to your garden can create a complete eco-system in your own backyard.



Benefits for Kids

- They will learn about science and how things in nature work, such as the cycle of life. Watching a plant grow from seed can be exciting for them.
- Discovering insects and other creatures in the garden can be a lot of fun for kids. An increased awareness and understanding of our environment is a key to preventing future damage to it.
- Even kids experience stress. Time in the garden can be a great way of bonding as a family, improving communication and reducing stress for everyone.
- Having plants to care for provides an opportunity for children to increase their sense of responsibility.

"Gardening is a labour of love. A treadmill is just labour."

Things To Remember To Enjoy Gardening

1. **Wear sunscreen.** Now available in sprays and gels that don't have the usual oily feel to them. For children especially, the best protection will come from SPF 50 or higher. You can also find special lightweight sunscreen clothing to reduce your UV exposure.
2. **Wear a hat and sunglasses.** Try to avoid gardening between 11 am and 4 pm, when the sun is the strongest, to reduce your UV exposure.
3. **Stay hydrated.** Drink approximately 1 – 2 glasses of water per hour, more if you are doing strenuous gardening during the hot summer months. Consult with your doctor for further information.
4. **Use a DEET based insect repellent.** When outdoors we are at risk for West Nile Virus, but this simple step greatly reduces that risk.
5. **Familiarize yourself with hazardous plants.** Accidental contact with these plants can ruin your day. By knowing how to identify Poison Ivy, Poison Oak, Stinging Nettles, etc. you will avoid rashes and days of scratching.
6. **Call before you dig.** Ontario One Call must be called prior to digging in your yard. Generally they require 5 business days to come out and mark the utilities on your property. If you fail to call and accidentally hit a line, it will result in expensive fines.
7. **Avoid over doing it.** Repetitive strain injuries can occur from doing one task for too long, so know when to stop. As an example, when pruning, if your hand begins to cramp, stop pruning and do something else in the yard. Look for ergonomically designed tools that conform to your hand or your posture. Muscle strains can result from lifting too much weight, improper techniques or tools.
8. **When using chemicals, follow the directions.** Over use or misuse of a product can be harmful to your plants and yourself. Be sure to carefully read the directions on the package prior to use and store them safely.
9. **Use the right tools for the job.** This may seem obvious, but injuries and broken tools, often occur when we try to take a short cut. As an example, if you are pruning large branches, use loppers or a saw rather than your hand pruners. Feel free to ask for advice from the experts at Humber Nurseries.
10. **Look for ways to make gardening more enjoyable.** There are many simple ways to keep gardening from being strenuous: if you struggle with a wheelbarrow full of soil, why not buy one with two front tires? If you have trouble getting up and down, there are several types of kneeling pads or specially designed gardening seats available. Keep your pruning and cutting tools sharp. If you have difficulty getting around the yard, use a gardening apron to carry small tools. Protect your hands with a good pair of gardening gloves. If you are pulling weeds in the yard or garden, wait until after a rain or water the area to make it easier.
11. **Experiment.** Why not try a plant that isn't supposed to grow where you want to put it? Lots of gardeners enjoy proving the experts wrong and end up with beautiful plants growing where they shouldn't. Keep in mind trying to work against nature can be a recipe for frustration.
12. **Plan on having fun.** Keep a positive frame of mind and enjoy your journey.

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**Green is not just a colour.....
It's our future.**

