

GARDENING TIPS

Gardening is great exercise! It is good for flexibility, strength, and stamina - but there are correct ways to approach gardening tasks to avoid the risk of back pain or injury.

Stretch Before You Start: Warming-up your muscles with stretches before going out helps reduce the stress and strain on your joints and muscles, reducing the chance of injury.

Bend Your Knees to Lift with Ease: When lifting, keep your back straight and bend your knees. Always carry the load close to your body and avoid twisting.

The right tools, the right moves: Use the right tools and moves for the job. Kneel to plant and change positions frequently when raking, digging, hoeing or pruning. Use ergonomically designed, long handled, lightweight tools.

Take a Break Before It Aches: Give yourself and your back a break. As a rule-of-thumb take a brief rest or stretch break at least three times each hour, and drink fluids frequently.

Preferred work positions: one knee on the ground, working on hands and knees using a kneeling pad, or sitting on a chair or stool. Use **correct postures** when doing garden chores such as raking, shoveling, and hoeing. (Raised beds can make gardening easier, reducing the need to stoop or bend down to get close to the soil. Width should be narrow enough to allow the gardener to work without straining or reaching. Some find it easier to use beds high enough to stand; others design a bed to slip their knees under while sitting.)

DO

- choose a lightweight, long handled garden tool
- wear loose, comfortable clothing
- keep your back straight while lifting the soil
- exert force through knees
- dig a little at a time
- take a break every 10-20 minutes
- use lightweight and small-bladed tools to reduce the amount of load and resistance
- stand as close to the work area as possible, and use arms and legs to do work
- instead of the back let gardening equipment and tools do the job for you.

DON'T

- strain, twist or reach too far in front
- take huge spadefulls
- dig continuously
- overload the wheelbarrow
- stoop or work too far in front of you
- use jerky, twisting, or rough movements; move slowly and deliberately
- stretch or squat with a bent back
- bend too far or twist to the side when starting the mower
- overstretch or swing mowers from side to side

Additional tips:

- Mow lawns regularly so that grass doesn't get too tall. An overgrown lawn takes more effort to mow.
- Adjust mower handle height to hip level and push mower with a straight back.
- For mowers with "power assist" features, be careful to adjust the pace to avoid straining the back (trying to either hold the mower back or push against the power drive will defeat the purpose).
- Use ground covers or mulch to reduce lawn mowing, weeds, and watering needs.
- Use a watering wand with an on/off control. Raise the spigot; relocate to edge of beds with short length of hose and post.
- Use soaker hoses or a sprinkler system for irrigation.
- Choose low maintenance plants such as groundcovers instead of annuals and turf grass.
- Use raised beds to reduce bending.
- Ask others for assistance with tasks that are difficult or cause strain.
- Buy garden supplies in small, lightweight quantities.
- Take frequent breaks and rotate between jobs so that back and knees are not strained for long periods of time.
- Be conscious of the twisting motion that can be produced when throwing mulch or shoveling soil as it can cause back strains.
- Be aware of situations that could lead to a fall such as wet lawn or loose gravel.

Reference: "Gardening and Your Health, Protecting Your Knees and Back"

<http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-065/426-065.html>

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