



CULTIVATE
HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY OF NSW
FACT SHEET 5
HEALTHY HABITS FOR GARDENING

Gardening is one of the most popular & loved pastimes. Taking a sensible approach to how you do things in the garden can give you more time & energy to devote to this pleasurable, creative & satisfying activity.

Here are some tips on doing things wisely & safely in the garden

- Rationalise & keep tasks simple.
- Collect all the materials and tools you need and have them ready at hand in a bucket or wheelbarrow, to save traversing the garden back & forth endless times. Save your energy for gardening.
- Decide beforehand what tasks you will tackle and try to stick to them, so that you have the satisfaction of seeing fruits of your labour. Avoid branching off into a myriad to half-completed tasks, which can be demoralising, as garden tasks can seem insurmountable!
- Be comfortable
- Gardening when sitting is often most comfortable. Avoid bending over excessively or awkwardly. Protect your joints. Avoid using muscles or holding joints in protracted positions. Change tasks & posture frequently and avoid awkward positions & postures than cause muscle strain & fatigue.
- Work at a comfortable pace. Take regular breaks to rest & admire your work.
- Drink water to keep you hydrated.
- Sun & skin protection
- Especially in summer, garden at cooler times of the day, early morning and evening. Avoid the heat and high ultraviolet exposure of the middle of the day (11 a.m. to 3 p.m). Always wear a broad brimmed hat and high SPF sunscreen on exposed parts of your body. Wear clothing that is comfortable, but protects you from sun and insects.

Choosing Tools:

Finding the right tools to use to make gardening safe, comfortable & enjoyable can be difficult. Finding just the right tool depends very much on the individual gardener's abilities, the nature of their garden, and the type of gardening they want to do. When possible handle the tool before you purchase it. Check that the weight and size of the tool are suited to what you want it to do. Whenever possible, test tools before making your purchase.

Here are some guiding principles for tool selection & use:

- Choose tools that are the correct weight for your body, build and strength.
- Choose lightweight tools (e.g. newer metal alloys & durable plastics), especially important for tools that extend your reach.
- Enhance comfort & grip by modifying handles with padding (e.g. foam insulation that can be slipped like a glove over tool handles) especially helpful for those with reduced gripping strength or arthritis. Even wearing snug gardening gloves can help grip & protect your hands.
- Ergonomic tools are designed to work with your body's mechanics. Long-handled tools save you having to bend & stretch to out-of-reach parts of the garden. Long-handled tools are most effective when gripped with both hands close to the body rather than extended, so adjust the length of the tool appropriately. Long-handled tools improve leverage. A range of long-handled tools is available, including watering wands and pruners.
- Assistive devices which make tools user friendly are available. For gardeners with very reduced or no hand function, use rehabilitation equipment such as cuffs, braces & utensil holders. Attach garden tools & modified eating utensils to cuffs & splints, to function as garden tools.
- Keep cutting tools well maintained & sharp to minimise the force needed to use them.
- Try children's gardening tools as these are smaller & lighter & require less strength to use. Such tools are often suitable for gardeners who use wheelchairs or who work from a seated position.
- Kneelers & knee pads are an option for gardening tasks at ground level.

Re-design your Garden:

Sometimes it is necessary or desirable to change the layout and nature of your garden, so that you can garden with greater ease and pleasure. Simple changes, such as incorporating a raised garden bed, using container plants, or vertical structures and widening garden paths, can make gardening easier and less strenuous.

Mulch improves soil texture, suppresses weeds & conserves soil moisture, and so is a labour-saving strategy on several counts. Minimise time & effort associated with weeding by smothering the soil with mulch or better still, mulch and groundcover plants.

A No Dig Garden:

Digging the soil can be arduous. Ways to get around this include bringing the soil to a comfortable working height (e.g. with raised beds), appropriate tools & posture. An alternative is creating a no-dig garden (see Dean, 1977).

References:

Adil, J.R. Accessible Gardening for People with Physical Disabilities: A Guide to Methods, Tools and Plants. Bethesda Maryland: Woodbine House, 1994. Cancer Council of NSW

<http://www.cancercouncil.com.au>

Dean, E. Esther Dean's Gardening Book: Growing without Digging. Sydney: Harper & Row, 1977.

DeHart M.R. and J.R. Brown. Horticultural Therapy: A Guide for All Seasons. St Louis: National Garden Clubs, 2001.

Elliot, P. The Garden & the Handicapped Child. London: Disabled Living Foundation, 1978.

Handreck, K. Gardening Down-Under. East Melbourne: CSIRO Publications, 1993.

Hewson, M.L. Horticulture as Therapy: A Practical Guide to Using Horticulture as a Therapeutic Tool. Canada: Greenmor Printing, 1994.

McHoy, P. The Complete Garden Planning Book. London: Hermes House, 1999.

Pease, P. (ed). Able to Garden: A Practical Guide for the Disabled & Elderly Gardeners. London: Batsford, 1990.

Pile, T. Gardening by Suburb. Sydney: Murdoch Books, 2000.

Rothert, G. The Enabling Garden: Creating Barrier-Free Gardens. G. Dallas: Taylor Publishing Co, 1994.

Simpson, S.P. and Straus, M. (eds). Horticulture as Therapy: Principles & Practice. New York: Haworth Press, 1998.

Well, S.E. (ed). Horticultural Therapy and the Older Adult Population. New York: Haworth Press, 1997.

Organisations & Associations:

- Cultivate - Horticultural Therapy Society of NSW
Teloopa Centre
250 Blaxland Road
Ryde NSW 2112 (02) 9448 6392
- Victorian Horticultural Therapy Association
<http://www.horticulturaltherapy.com.au/>
- Thrive
The Geoffrey Udall Centre
Beech Hill
Reading England
RG7 2AT
<http://www.thrive.org.uk>
- www.chicagobotanic.org/therapy
- The American Horticultural Therapy Association
909 York Street
Denver Colorado 80206-3799
<http://www.ahta.org>
- People-Plant Council
Department of Horticulture
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
(Newsletter, research bibliography, publications, conferences).
<http://www.hort.vt.edu/HUMAN/PPC.html>
- The Occupational Therapy Board of Australia
<http://www.ahpra.gov.au/occupational-therapy.aspx>
- Australian Rehabilitation & Assistive Technology Association
<http://www.e-bility.com>
- Independent Living Centre of NSW
<http://www.ilcnsw.asn.au>
- Cancer Council, NSW
<http://www.cancercouncil.com.au>

Related Links:

Use Internet search engines with the key words: enabling garden, healing garden, accessible garden, horticultural therapy, and barrier-free gardening, etc., to identify links to many different resources related to gardening for people with disabilities. Some interesting & helpful sites are listed below.

- Australian Society for Growing Native Plants.
<http://asgap.org.au>
- Garden Forever
(Many wonderful links for gardeners with disabilities, arthritis, allergies).
<http://www.gardenforever.com>
- Gardening for Good
Great site with suggestions for gardeners.
<http://www.carryongardening.org.uk>
- Horticultural Therapy and Therapeutic Recreation Information
www.horticulturaltherapy.info
- Guelph Enabling Garden
www.enablinggarden.org
- The Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access (IDEA).
This Centre conducts research, education and design projects on universal design and environmental access.
<http://idea.ap.buffalo.edu//home/index.asp>
- The National Center on Physical Activity and Disability
The National Center on Physical Activity and Disability,
University of Illinois at Chicago. Some excellent resource material.
<http://www.ncpad.org>