

Healthy Gardening
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(adapted from the AOTA --tips for living)

Gardening is one of America's number one outdoor leisure activities. Even in our frequently harsh mountain environment with the limited growing season, many locals can't wait until the snow melts to begin their gardening activities. Gardening can be a very heavy physical activity. As rewarding as working outdoor in the garden can be, it can also cause and flare up many aches and pains. This is true especially in the spring when the preparation and planting process begins. Here are several tips for gardening to make is easier and more comfortable, even if you are still nursing your winter sports injuries.

Take time to warm up -- Gardening involves awkward positions, repetition and lifting similar to many sports. You might be using muscle groups that have been "dormant" throughout the winter months. Do a short warm up of stretching and walking before approaching your gardening activities.

Protect your joints - Choose implements with padded handles and shears with self opening features. Good quality padded gardening gloves are a must and will protect the small joints of your hand. A good quality pair of bicycle gloves will help protect your hands when using the lawnmower or weed eater. This is a good barrier for vibration which can be a culprit in carpal tunnel syndrome.

Plan ahead for comfort - When you can, sit to work in the garden. Purchase comfort items such as kneeling stools, knee pads, or benches. There are a variety of products available at garden departments. Organize your gardening activities before you start and gather needed items to avoid frequent trips back to the shed or garage.

Limit unnecessary lifting - Use garden carts to move tools and materials. Divide heavy loads into smaller and more manageable loads. Learn how to lift properly using a squat type lift instead of a forward bend to prevent a lifting injury. Use lighter weight hoses and coiling devises. Consider using long handled tools when possible, to decrease the frequency of bending or stooping. When items are just too heavy to lift, wait for help or consider hiring out some of the heavier tasks.

Adapt your garden - If you suffer from back injury or arthritis, consider having raised gardens areas built. This is a great way to garden and minimize the need to repetitively bend or squat. Gardening in large pots may also be a way to enjoy this leisure activity if your muscles don't cooperate with more extensive projects. Also, think small. Choose a smaller garden area that you can manage without excess exertion. Locate it near your house and near the water supply to reduce hauling.

Vary your tasks - Rotate tasks to avoid repetition when possible. This will help avoid too much stress on one group of muscle or joints.

Pace yourself - Although your enthusiasm may be high after snow melt, your body may not be ready for long hours of gardening. Do your gardening in small attainable sessions and slowly build up to longer periods of time. Too much gardening in one day can put you out of commission for several days.

After considering some of these gardening tips, some good weather, and a green thumb, hopefully your gardening season will be off to a great start!!!