

# Can you dig it?

## ERGONOMIC TIPS FOR GARDENERS

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We must keep in mind that the most important gardening tool we have is our body. When we begin to hurt, it takes us away from the activity we enjoy so much, so it's worth the time and effort to learn to garden ergonomically. Proper body positioning, well designed gardening gloves and tools and frequent rest breaks are the keys to being a healthy gardener.

### Preparation for Gardening: The Warm-up

*You wouldn't play a sport without warming up, so why would you garden without warming up? Gardening is a very physical activity requiring use of the entire body. Spend 10 minutes doing a warm up!*

### Gardening Ergonomics: Gloves

- Always use gloves. They protect and provide padding.
- Gloves should be made of material appropriate for the specific task (example: gloves for working with chemicals as opposed to gloves for pruning rose bushes or working the soil).
- Gloves should be form fitting without being restrictive.
- Thin gloves are preferable. Too much padding will decrease the feeling in the hand and decrease hand strength by as much as 30 percent. This decreases overall hand coordination and power grip.

### Gardening Ergonomics: Tools

- Choose the proper tool for the task at hand.
- Look for tools that fit YOUR body.
- Try out tools before you buy because handle size, weight, and length of spindle are all key when it comes to using a tool.
- Telescopic and pistol-grip handles require less energy and keep the body in proper alignment.

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### Gardening Ergonomics: Shoulder

- *Work below shoulder level when possible. When that is unavoidable, perform task for five minutes or less; then take a break or perform another activity before continuing.*
- *Use both arms whenever possible.*

### Gardening Ergonomics: Elbows

- *When possible, work with the forearms in a neutral position (i.e. thumbs up).*
- *Keep the elbows partially bent while gardening, especially when doing resistive activities requiring elbow strength.*
- *Keep your wrist straight (in line with your forearm) when pushing, pulling, and grasping. This decreases the tension on the elbow and wrist.*
- *Avoid twisting the forearms back and forth on a repetitive basis (example: pulling weeds by twisting the forearm palm up and then palm down). Consider using a weeder.*

### Gardening Ergonomics: Wrists (Grip)

- *Thumb and forefinger should meet when wrapped around a handle.*
- *Work with wrists in a neutral position by avoiding the extremes of motion (up, down, and sideways).*
- *Hold objects with a light grasp or pinch, avoiding a tight sustained grip.*
- *Grip strength is at its maximum when the wrist is in a relaxed or "neutral" position.*
- *Avoid repetitive pinching and pulling with the fingers and thumb.*