

THE NEED TO KNOW GUIDE TO

**GARDENING**

— **FOR** —

**HEALTH**

BY ANGELA YOUNGMAN

**YMCA**

---

HEALTH AND FITNESS GUIDES

Published by Central YMCA Trading Ltd. Registered Company No. 3667206.

Copyright © Central YMCA Trading Ltd 2016

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Central YMCA Trading Ltd  
112 Great Russell Street  
London  
WC1B 3NQ

This book is presented solely for educational and entertainment purposes. The author and publisher are not offering it as legal, medical, or other professional services advice. While best efforts have been used in preparing this book, the author and publisher make no representations or warranties of any kind and assume no liabilities of any kind with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness of use for a particular purpose. Neither the publisher nor the individual author(s) shall be liable for any physical, psychological, emotional, financial, or commercial damages, including, but not limited to, special, incidental, consequential or other damages, resulting from the information or programs contained herein. Every person is different and the information, advice and programs contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. Exercise is not without its risks and, as such, we would strongly advise that you consult with your healthcare professional before beginning any programme of exercise, especially if you have, or suspect you may have, any injuries or illnesses, are currently pregnant or have recently given birth. The advice, information and guidance given in Central YMCA Guides is in no way intended as a substitute for medical consultation. As with any form of exercise, you should stop immediately if you feel faint, dizzy or have physical discomfort or pain or any other contra indication, and consult a physician.

Central YMCA is the world's founding YMCA. Established in 1844 in Central London, it was the first YMCA to open its doors and, in so doing, launched a movement that has now grown to become the world's biggest youth organisation. Today, Central YMCA is the UK's leading health, fitness and wellbeing charity, committed to helping people from all walks of life – and specifically the young and those with a specific need – to live happier, healthier and more fulfilled lives.

*The content of this document remains the intellectual property of, and is copyright to London Central YMCA (Trading as YMCA Awards). No part of these materials may be reproduced, stored, copied, edited or distributed in any form or by any means including photocopying, publishing, recording or by any other electronic or mechanical methods, without the explicit written permission of YMCA Awards. YMCA Awards reserves the right to seek legal remedies for any such infringement.*



## About the author

Angela Youngman is a freelance journalist and author. She is a member of the Garden Media Guild and specialises in gardening, leisure, travel, tourism, history and education. Angela has written numerous books on gardening and walking, as well as a successful ebook series exploring places and film locations associated with historical and literary people including Beatrix Potter, the Brontes, Shakespeare, Snow White, Sherlock Holmes, Richard III, Tolkien's Hobbit, Victor Hugo's Les Miserables and Ian Fleming.

As a journalist Angela writes regularly for *Grow It* magazine, has undertaken editorial work on a wide range of topics for numerous publications, and has written and compiled copy for a variety of websites.

Angela is also often called upon to deliver talks to garden clubs across the UK on a variety of gardening topics including green gardening, companion planting, grey water and recycling in the garden. She is married, has two children and lives in Norfolk.

## Introduction

Gardening is one of the best possible ways of obtaining exercise and staying healthy. There are numerous advantages. It helps your physical and mental wellbeing, your diet, as well as your overall health. It is not just exercising for the sake of exercising; it allows you to achieve improvements in your own life and make a difference to your surroundings.

Gardening is an activity that has an immediate impact on your environment too – and costs very little to undertake. All you need is somewhere to garden, a few tools and a selection of your favourite plants. There are no gym fees to be paid and at the end of each session you can instantly see the results of your work, as well as your workout, which can bring an unmatched sense of achievement and a noticeable lift in your spirits. Indeed, with gardening the feel good factor is very much in evidence.

Spending time in the garden helps to take your mind off everyday problems. The physical activity, meanwhile, helps your body relax and reduces tension. It is a brilliant way of reducing stress – pulling up weeds or digging a flowerbed can definitely negate the effects of a bad day at work.

Furthermore, gardening is a physical activity that can be enjoyed by everyone, no matter their age or physical ability. We can all benefit from the exercise involved as regular sessions of pruning, digging, weeding or mowing can offer a serious aerobic workout. Indeed, an hour in the garden each week can be as good as a session in the gym for providing you with a full-body workout.

Simply being outside in the fresh air, meanwhile, will improve your intake of Vitamin D, which can lead to improvements in bone density and boost your immune system.

Grow your own food and the health advantages of gardening multiply further. You'll benefit from the fresh air and activity, but you'll also be able to enjoy the nutritional benefits of your home grown fruit, vegetables and salad crops.

Gardening is not difficult to learn either, even if you're a complete novice. Garden Clubs can be found in many locations and provide social interaction among gardeners who are always willing to offer advice.

Over the pages of this book we'll look at the various health benefits of gardening and some of the research that has proven its effectiveness. We'll also look at what you'll need to start gardening if you're a complete novice, ways to make gardening tasks easier, common dangers in the garden, simple warm up exercises to ensure you don't do yourself an injury and a host of useful tips to make the most of your time in the garden.

Fitness, fun, friendship and even food...what more could you ask for? Reach for your secateurs today and get gardening.

## Chapter One

### The health benefits of gardening

Gardening is one of the healthiest activities anyone can undertake and is easy to fit into your daily or weekly routines. Rather than being a quick fix, gardening is an endurance exercise, which strengthens bones, and improves your heart rate, lung power and muscle strength. Furthermore, the effect on your health of this varied form of exercise will be sustained over a long period as you become stronger and fitter through the everyday work needed to maintain your garden.

As proof, researchers at Kansas State University reported in the respected horticultural journal, *HortScience* (February, 2009; <http://hortsci.ashspublications.org/>), that people who actively gardened demonstrated 'best levels' of physical health and 'higher than average' levels of self-esteem. Similarly, numerous other reports and studies, from both sides of Atlantic and noted over the coming pages, have all drawn the same conclusions. Gardening, in a nutshell, is good for us.

### Prune your calories

Gardening can use up a tremendous amount of calories and help you reduce your weight by burning fat. Without realising it you can burn up to around 300 calories (dependent on gender and weight) an hour just from mowing, digging and weeding. For example:

Task	Estimated calories burnt per hour
Digging	325
Pruning	290
Planting seedlings	260
Raking moss and grass clippings from the lawn	260
Weeding	290
Watering the garden	90

(Adapted from R J Maughan: *Nutrition in Sport*. Blackwell Publishing)

Of course, eating sensibly and not indulging in chocolate bars or heavy food immediately afterwards is essential to ensure that the advantages gained by using up so many calories are not lost. Fat loss will be experienced over a period of time as long as healthy eating practices are maintained.

To get an idea of how many calories you could burn, use the NHS Fitness Self-Assessment tool, available here: <http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Fitness.aspx?Tag>.

### A question of balance

Balancing out gardening activities and varying what you do will ensure that you maximise the health benefits of your stint in the garden and that the benefits are felt throughout your body and not just through a few aching muscles.

Bear in mind that tasks like raking and weeding tend to favour one side of the body because you are automatically using your dominant hand all the time, so try to use your non-dominant hand for short periods, slowly increasing the amount of time the non-dominant hand is in use. For example, this might simply involve alternating hands when carrying out

simple tasks like carrying or using a watering can. So, if you are right handed, make sure that the left hand is utilised every now and again. Try doing a little bit of weeding or raking with the left hand for a while. This gives your dominant hand a rest, and strengthens the less dominant hand. Initially it will feel strange and a bit awkward, but with practice it does encourage maximum fitness and balanced movement.

## **Stress busting**

Gardening is a fantastic way of dealing with stress and helping you unwind after a stressful day in the office. In our modern world, stress is an ever-increasing problem. Money worries, problems at work, problems within the family or with neighbours can quickly escalate and become all-consuming, affecting all aspects of your life and health. Gardening is a way in which this stress can be released. The physical activity involved helps the body to loosen up, and relax. Digging over a vegetable plot or weeding a flower bed, for example, allows you to release the feelings of frustration and worry for a while, thus making it easier to deal with those problems in the future.

In recent years there has been a growth in the development of horticultural therapy as a way of helping people overcome physical or mental health issues. Medical professionals have, for example, recognised that gardening can help people who are depressed, recovering from illness or who lack confidence (Ecotherapy: The green agenda for mental health, MIND 2007, [http://www.mind.org.uk/assets/0000/2138/ecotherapy\\_report.pdf](http://www.mind.org.uk/assets/0000/2138/ecotherapy_report.pdf); Growing Together, Loughborough University/Thrive 2005, <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/ccfr/Publications/Evidence6.pdf>)

Thrive – a UK-based charity that helps people with a disability to start or continue gardening – champions horticultural therapy to great effect. Find out more at <http://www.thrive.org.uk>.

## **Seeing is believing**

Of course, with gardening, the results of your exercise workout will be plain to see in your garden; be it with a freshly mown lawn, neatly trimmed hedge or pruned bush. The garden will look better – a reward you simply don't get if you opt for an hour on a treadmill.

The change in its appearance may only be slight, but there will be changes you can see, no matter what you've done to your garden. In other words, a sense of accomplishment is guaranteed.

New gardeners, meanwhile, will find that they are learning new skills while making a difference to their environment and improving their fitness. A pretty garden will also add value to your home and offer somewhere you and your family can relax and unwind – itself a perfect tonic to stress. Providing your children or grandchildren with somewhere to play will also boost their activity and fitness levels and, hopefully in some cases, wear them out enough to enable you to enjoy a good night's sleep.

## **A vitamin boost**

An added advantage to gardening comes from just being outdoors, where your body will soak up bundles of vitamin D. Vital for the development of your immune system and for helping bones grow and form, vitamin D is found in a range of foods such as eggs, but much

of the vitamin D that we obtain comes from sunlight on our skin. Vitamin D deficiency can lead to diseases such as osteoporosis (reduced density of bones making them more brittle and liable to break). So, by being outside and undertaking physical activity in the fresh air and sunlight, you're essentially stockpiling vitamin D.

### **You are what you eat**

Health scares relating to food or food production are all too common and in recent years this has included references to pesticides found on vegetables and fruit sold in supermarkets. Farmers spray pesticides onto crops to deal with pests and diseases and, by the time it reaches the supermarket shelves, a single lettuce may have been sprayed several times. Residues of these chemicals will inevitably remain, which is why washing all your fruit and veg is so important.

However, the only sure fire way of ensuring that the food you eat is 100% pesticide free is to grow it yourself. As a result, more and more gardeners are taking this approach and there has been a resurgence of interest in allotments, with lengthy waiting lists for plots in some areas.

There is nothing quite as satisfying as growing your own vegetables. You know exactly what has been used on the vegetables, you know how old they are, and you know what condition they are in. Furthermore, because they are grown in your own garden you know they are totally fresh and the fresher they are, the more vitamins they contain. Even if you only have a small plot, you can easily grow a row of lettuce.

---

### **Did you know?**

A packet of lettuce seeds is not expensive, and may contain over 1,000 seeds. Sowing just a few lettuce plants each week will provide a continuous supply throughout the summer. You can even grow a few plants in pots on windowsills during the winter to continue the supply.

---

Research has shown that home grown vegetables are better for you than shop bought. Shop bought vegetables may be a week or more old before they reach the store. They will have been transported across the country and often kept in cool storage. In many circumstances vegetables may have travelled from another country to reach your dinner plate. Food picked in the garden, however, is generally used on the same day and the distance from garden to plate is very short, ensuring that very few vitamins are lost.

(The validity of food miles as an indicator of sustainable development, DEFRA 2005, <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/evidence/economics/foodfarm/reports/documents/foodmile.pdf>)

The nutritional value of foods does change when the food is picked. The natural sugars in sweet corn and peas, for instance, turn to starch quite quickly after picking, which makes a significant difference to taste. Likewise, research has shown that the vitamin C content of broccoli falls about 50% within four days of harvesting. Similar losses are common to other vegetables.

(Lee and Kader, Preharvest and postharvest factors influencing vitamin C content of horticultural crops, *Postharvest Biology and Technology* 2000; <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0925521400001332>; Rambey and

McAnnelley, From the farm to the kitchen table: A review on nutrient Losses in foods, *Glycoscience & Nutrition* 2002, <http://www.doctortudor.com/fromthefarm.pdf>)

Clearly, the nutritional value of fresh vegetables picked straight from your garden will be greater than that of food which has been picked some time ago. The quality of the food you are eating will therefore benefit your health. Home grown vegetables are also easier on your wallet and, in my opinion, taste far better than anything that can be purchased.

---

**Did you know?**

A 2009 study by the National Gardening Association of America (<http://www.gardenresearch.com/files/2009-Impact-of-Gardening-in-America-White-Paper.pdf>) found that 36 million American households grew vegetables in their gardens, saving an average of \$530 on each of their annual grocery bills.

---



## **Chapter Two**

### **Getting started**

Dress sensibly when planning to work in the garden and do not try to be fashionable. It is better to wear older clothes that are comfortable and will absorb sweat. Remember, you will be doing a lot of bending, twisting and stretching so your clothes will need to be comfortable. Loose clothing is better than tight, restrictive clothing and it should also be hardwearing. If it is chilly, add a jersey or coat that can be removed later when the weather, or you, becomes warmer.

Wear strong shoes, rubber boots or trainers, not sandals, to protect your feet. It can be very painful if you accidentally drop secateurs or hand tools, or hit your feet with the tines of a garden fork. Gloves will also protect your hands from the worst scratches, cuts and blisters. A hat with a brim, meanwhile, will help protect your eyes and face when dealing with overhead thorny branches, as well as help to prevent sunburn, for which of course you will need to apply sunscreen with a suitably high SPF. (The NHS recommend SPF 15 as a minimum (<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/travelhealth/Pages/SunsafetyQA.aspx>), but I'd opt for SPF 30 to 50 to be on the safe side.)

### **Plan your gardening session**

When working in the garden, be realistic. Do not try to do too much at a time. Although gardening is good exercise, it is also tiring as it involves quite strenuous physical activity. Weather conditions can make it even more tiring – especially when you are working in high winds, cold or very hot weather. So, remember to take time off from all the work simply to enjoy your garden and relax in it.

Have a clear aim as to what you want to achieve each time you work in the garden and make sure it is a manageable amount. It might be just to clear a specific border, prune the roses and shrubs, or sow a number of vegetable seeds. Whatever your goal for the day, have all the equipment you need for that task with you when you start the job, saving you extra journeys to and from the shed. Give the chosen task priority and do not let yourself be diverted until that task is complete. The fact that you achieved what you set out to do will give you a worthy sense of achievement, so any other task that you manage to do in the garden after that point is a bonus.

### **Choose your tools**

Using the right tools for the job can make a tremendous difference when gardening. Although garden tools may look very similar when you see them in a garden centre or DIY store, there are considerable differences in terms of weight, size and effect. Let's take one example: digging tools. There are dozens of different types of forks and spades and the variety of materials from which they can be made is enormous – aluminium handles, wooden handles, solid forged heads, stainless steel, carbon steel, the list goes on. With forks, meanwhile, there's the added complication of shaft size (ranging between 70-95cm) and tine length (from 25-30cm). As for spades, handles could span from 25-30cm, with blades from 20-28cm deep.

Such variances can make a tremendous difference when you are gardening. Tools have to be the right height and weight for your own circumstances. If it is too tall or too small, then it will affect the way in which you bend. If the tool is too light or too heavy, it will make

gardening tasks more difficult and more tiring. There is no point in adding unnecessary strain on your muscles by using unsuitable tools.

#### **Top tips for choosing your tools:**

- Aluminium handles are light to use, but can feel cold in the winter. Wooden handles should be smooth and fit neatly into the palm of the hand. If the wood is rough, it will cause splinters and blisters.
- Blades are either carbon steel or stainless steel. Stainless steel tends to be lighter and is easier to maintain.
- Taller gardeners often find tools with tilted handles easier to use as they give better leverage and put less strain on the back.
- Multi-tools are ideal for gardeners on a tight budget, particularly if the tools are going to be used by more than one person in the household. Heads – ranging from hoes to cultivators – can be purchased separately and slotted onto a handle secured in place by a click mechanism. The available handle lengths vary, so a tall person and a shorter person could have separate handles but still be able to use the same tool heads.

#### **Know your barrow**

Wheelbarrows are a common cause of damaged muscles. All too often, gardeners choose a wheelbarrow that is too big. They think that the bigger the capacity, the fewer trips they will need to take with it. The problem is that they forget that a wheelbarrow filled with weeds, soil and debris weighs much more than the empty wheelbarrow from the garden centre. The temptation is always to overload a wheelbarrow, but this immediately causes problems. Pushing or pulling a full wheelbarrow stretches muscles. If the wheelbarrow is too big and too heavy, it could cause arm and back strain.

#### **Top tips for choosing a wheelbarrow**

- For maximum comfort, a wheelbarrow's handles should be in line with your shoulders when you pick them up. If you have to stretch your arms out when pushing this will put stress on your neck, shoulder blades and back.
- Consider the type of tyre involved. There are two types available – solid or pneumatic. Much depends on your personal preferences. Pneumatic tyres are often preferred because they are light and can go over bumps easily. Unfortunately, they also puncture easily when going over sharp stones or thorns and the ease with which repairs can be undertaken varies considerably since not all pneumatic tyres have easily accessible valves or inner tubes. Once a tyre has been punctured, it does become weaker and more susceptible to further punctures or problems. Solid tyres, meanwhile, have the advantage that they will never puncture and will last a long time, but they do add to the weight of the barrow and make it slightly harder to push.

#### **Handling issues**

Cultivating tools aren't alone in cursing unsuspecting gardeners with bouts of back pain. If a lawnmower handle is too high or too low, for example, mowing the lawn can become an ordeal that makes backache much more likely. It is therefore better to choose a lawnmower

with an adjustable handle as these can be set to suit each user, allowing the gardener to mow in an upright position. This takes the stress off the back while mowing.

Loppers are essential gardening tools if you have tall shrubs or trees and they can cut thicker branches than can secateurs. Bear in mind that loppers can be very heavy when you are lifting them up and reaching to cut a branch above head height. This inevitably places stress on the back, arms, wrists and shoulders.

My top tip: Use lightweight loppers and keep the cutting mechanism well oiled. If you are using telescopic loppers, make sure that they are used only at a length that is comfortable for your height and build. It is also important not to overextend your arms as this reduces the effectiveness of the power you can apply when cutting, as well as potentially leads to injury. Whatever type of loppers you choose, remember that it will require considerable strength from your arms and wrists. Using loppers should only be undertaken for short periods.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Exercises for mobility**

No athlete would dream of undertaking any form of physical exercise without warming up first. Gardening also utilises a large degree of physical effort and does pose a similar risk to your muscles and joints, so just as an athlete would warm up before a run, so should you before a stint in the garden.

A walk around the garden is a good way to start. This increases blood flow to the muscles and wakes up the brain. As a result, the muscles become more relaxed and warmer. As you walk, you can mentally prepare yourself for the coming tasks by looking around, checking what needs to be done and fetching equipment.

#### **Part one**

##### **Warm up exercises**

Here are a few mobility and stretching exercises to set you up for the challenges that await you in your garden. The exercises should be achievable for all fitness levels, but if you have suffered any injuries in the past then only perform the ones that you are comfortable with. Each exercise can be adjusted by reducing the range of motion to ensure that you undertake a warm up that works for you.

##### **Exercise 1: Shallow squats**

These will help to build up your heart rate so that blood flows easily around all the muscles you'll be using.

##### **Step-by-step:**

1. Stand up straight and begin to lower yourself down as if to sit in a chair.
2. Make sure that your knees do not go beyond the levels of your toes and that they are aligned to avoid putting any pressure on the knee joints.
3. Keep your chest lifted and avoid hunching over.
4. Squat down as deep as you feel comfortable to do so.
5. Rise back to a standing position, keeping your abdominal muscles tight all the time. This will help your posture.
6. Repeat 10 times.
7. Then, raise yourself up from a squat onto your toes. This will warm the calf muscles and the ankle joint.
8. Repeat 10 times.

##### **Exercise 2: Heel flicks**

This exercise will help stretch muscles and improve the heart rate.

##### **Step-by-step:**

1. Begin by standing with your feet slightly wider apart than shoulder width. Feet, knees and hips should face forwards.
2. Place your hands on your hips.
3. Bring the heel of your foot upwards to touch your bottom, flexing your knee at the same time. As you do this, you will rise onto your toes on your other foot.
4. Repeat the exercise, changing from one side to the other for 30 seconds in total.

### **Exercise 3: Shoulder rolls**

This exercise is designed to mobilise the shoulders and upper back muscles.

#### **Step-by-step:**

1. Begin by standing with your shoulders relaxed. Place your hands at your sides.
2. Bring your shoulders up towards your ears then pull them back and down, then forwards to complete the circle.
3. Repeat this exercise for approximately 30 seconds.

### **Exercise 4: Torso twists**

This exercise allows you to mobilise your spine and back muscles.

#### **Step-by-step:**

1. Place one hand on top of the other at approximately the same level as your heart. Try to keep your elbows in line with your wrists creating a straight line from elbow to elbow.
2. Twist to each side slowly, but keep your hips facing forwards. This allows you to gently rotate your body and loosen the lower spine.
3. Repeat six times, first on your left side, then on your right side.

### **Exercise 5: Side bends**

This is another exercise designed to mobilise your spine and back muscles.

#### **Step-by-step:**

1. Start with your hands resting by your side.
2. Slowly drop down to one side making sure you don't move forwards or backwards – imagine you are caught between two panes of glass and your only possible movement is to the side.
3. Drop down as low as feels comfortable for you. Try to bring your hands down to knee level.
4. Repeat six times on each side.

### **Exercise 6: Wrist roll**

This is an exercise to mobilise wrist joints.

#### **Step-by-step:**

1. Begin by interlocking your fingers.
2. Don't hold your fingers too tightly.
3. Gently bend your wrists forward in a semi-circle, then backwards for the same amount.
4. Do this for 30 seconds clockwise, and 30 seconds anti-clockwise.

### **Exercise 7: Prayer stretch**

The aim of this exercise is to strengthen the wrist joint against the resistance encountered when undertaking tasks like digging.

**Step-by-step:**

1. Place your hands together at eye-level with your fingers straight and pointing upwards.
2. Keep the hands together as you move your elbows out to the side then return to the start position by bringing your elbows together.

**Exercise 8: Upper back Stretch**

This exercise aims to stretch the back muscles to reduce the risk of damage when undertaking tasks such as pulling and digging. It also helps to rotate and exercise the wrist muscles.

**Step-by-step:**

1. Loosely interlock your fingers with the palms facing inwards.
2. Relax your shoulders and straighten your arms outwards, making sure you are only going as far as is comfortable.
3. Hold the position for 10 seconds and then repeat, but this time with the palms facing outwards.

**Exercise 9: Relieving neck tension**

Here are three simple tips for relieving tension if your neck and shoulders are feeling a little taut:

1. Shrug shoulders several times. This reduces the muscle tension.
2. Breathe gently and deeply. Allow your jaw and face to relax.
3. Smile!

**Exercise 10: Relieving tight muscles**

If your wrists, forearms or back begin to feel a little tight while you're gardening, you should try to mobilise the area. This will increase the blood flow to the muscles and increase mobility at the joints. Here are a couple of tips:

- Shake your wrists and forearms. If they are still sore, stretch out your arm in front of you with the palm flat but facing outwards. With your other hand, push the fingers of your outstretched arm towards the ground – this will stretch both the wrists and forearms.
- For the back: keep your hips facing forwards and begin to rotate your upper body to each side, slowly increasing the movement. Begin to include your arms to add to the mobility of your body. While rotating, stretch your arms out to the side as far as possible, while maintaining your hip position.

**Exercise 11: Cat stretch**

The cat stretch is a great exercise that helps to increase flexibility in the lower back and core muscles. It's also a fantastic way to relieve tension generated from lots of lifting and bending.

**Step-by-step:**

1. Begin in a kneeling position on all fours. Position your hands immediately under your shoulders and your knees directly under your hips.
2. Point your fingers forward, keep your palms flat and spread your fingers out. Point your toes towards the back and keep your neck and back aligned in a straight line.
3. Arch your back like a cat, beginning with the lower back and all the way through to the upper back – eventually pushing your back upwards. Drop your head down with your chin tucked towards your chest. Pull in your stomach towards your spine. Hold for 10 – 15 seconds.
4. Lower yourself slowly back to the starting position, keeping your stomach muscles tight throughout. When releasing the back start at the upper back and slowly release each part of the spine until you return to your original position of a straight back on all fours.

### **Winding down after gardening**

#### **Exercise 12: Muscle stretches**

Once you've finished your gardening, take a few moments to stretch out those tired muscles. By stretching, you're helping your body to recover for the next day by flushing out any fatigue that has built up. If you have noticed an increase in your heart rate throughout your endeavours then use your stretches as a way to return it to its natural rhythm slowly.

1. Repeat the stretches from the warm up but hold them for a little longer to reduce the stiffness.
2. Breathe deeply and allow plenty of oxygen into your lungs. This will help create a feeling of wellbeing and will further speed up your recovery.

However, take care if your muscles are really hurting; do not force them to stretch. Rub and massage out the stiffness to get the muscles warm and relaxed. A hot shower or bath helps, especially if you add some lavender oil to the water.

Sit down and relax for a few minutes. Enjoy the garden. Find somewhere comfortable to wind down. Deep breathing and breathing in the scent of lavender, roses or herbs will encourage a feeling of relaxation.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Staying healthy when gardening**

Gardening is a physical activity and it is important to keep your body healthy while undertaking tasks in the garden.

#### **Top tips:**

1. Do not try to do too much at once and if your body starts to complain – stop immediately.
2. Work for shorter periods and take regular breaks and you'll achieve more than pushing yourself to do too much.
3. Try not to do the same task for long periods of time. Varying tasks avoids the risk of developing repetitive strain injuries, as well as boredom on your part! So change jobs on a regular basis. For example, prune tree branches or cut the edge of lawns for a short period, then change to a task that requires the use of different muscles such as digging, weeding or mowing the lawn. Return to your original task later.
4. Always recognise when your body is telling you that you have done enough. Avoid trying to do too much at any one point. If your body is getting stiff or aching, then it is time to stop and take a break.

#### **Knee care**

Knees are always at risk in a garden and many gardeners experience knee problems at some point in their gardening careers. The reason is not hard to find. Many garden tasks such as weeding, hand digging, and picking fruit involve a lot of kneeling and often on damp or stony ground. In the summer, meanwhile, the soil can be very hard and cause muscles to stiffen or inflame existing conditions such as arthritis.

Thankfully, the answer is simple – use a kneeler, knee pads, sponge mat or even a newspaper to protect your knees against stones, or damp or hard soil. If you have difficulty rising up from a kneeling position, then it is worth considering using a kneeler with handles. Gripping the handles will make it easier to stand up.

#### **Back care**

Remember that knees are meant to bend – not backs. Try to keep your back as straight as possible when bending. This will reduce the risk of injury when you are digging. Never stay in a bent posture for more than 15 minutes at a time. Take a break, stretch your legs and knee muscles. Walk around for a minute or so before restarting your task.

We're all tempted to try and stretch just that bit too far or too high in order to get the job done, particularly when we're pruning trees, trimming hedges or watering hanging baskets. The risk here is that you will tilt your neck at an awkward angle, bend awkwardly or even fall and injure yourself. So, in a nutshell, don't do it.

Consider using long handled tools or a stepladder. This will reduce the need to tilt the head and neck backwards or to stretch too far.



### **Two top tips for safe ladder usage:**

1. Make sure that the ladder is on a firm, level surface.
2. Ensure someone is near at hand to hold the ladder if necessary.

### **Eye care**

Your eyes may be at risk from thorny branches, grass trimmings as you strim, or any of a thousand other possibilities as you work in the garden. So have some clean tissues at hand to wipe your eyes if dirt gets in them and, if you are using electrical equipment or undertaking the pruning of thorny bushes, consider a pair of goggles. Canes used to stake long stemmed perennials or vegetable plants should also be topped with a cork. This will protect your eyes from accidental injury when bending over the plants.

### **My healthy body top 15**

1. Take care of your body while gardening and watch out for signs that problems are developing.
2. Before starting work in the garden, do some simple bending and stretching exercises such as those suggested in Chapter 3. This will warm up your muscles and decrease the risk of injury.
3. Do not try to stand up or change posture too quickly. This can temporarily reduce the blood pressure in your head, and can cause fainting. If you feel dizzy – stop immediately. Medical assistance may be necessary.
4. Do not do too much too quickly. It is better to build up the amount of physical activity involved in gardening over a few days, rather than go all out to do everything at the beginning. Your body needs time to adjust to new requirements.
5. If your body starts to hurt, then stop and have a break. Change to a different activity when you start again. This will give the muscles you were originally using a chance to recover.
6. Keep your wrists straight and relaxed when grasping hand tools. Check that the tools you are using fit your hands. Tools should fit neatly into your hands and feel comfortable. If there are moulded finger grips on the tools, then they should match the span of your own fingers. If your fingers have to stretch to reach the grips, then you risk long-term damage to your hands. These are tools you will be using a lot, so it is important to make sure they are right for you.
7. Regular gardening will build up your physical strength and allow you to do more. Gardening is physically strenuous and a lot of stamina is needed. It is better to do small amounts of gardening on a regular basis, than to undertake a lengthy period of gardening now and again.
8. Do not work for too long in the sun. Wear a hat with a brim and use a high SPF sunscreen on all exposed skin. Remember that shirts can ride up leaving gaps between your trousers and your top when working and bending in the garden.
9. Have plenty of drinks at hand. In hot weather it is very easy to become dehydrated. Keep a bottle of water in a cool bag in a sheltered spot near where you are working.
10. After a period of gardening, allow time for your body to rest. Stop for a moment and try some slow, deep breathing. This helps the body to wind down. Practise some deep breathing near some fragrant lavender, roses or mint as this encourages relaxation. Sit down for a few minutes and enjoy the garden. Relaxation is important.

11. Stretch arm and leg muscles to get rid of any tautness. Turn your head and neck from side to side to stretch the neck muscles. If your muscles are really aching and hurting, rub or massage out the stiffness. A hot shower or bath with lavender oil will help.
12. Keep a first aid kit nearby. Scratches, bruises and small cuts are inevitable. Thorns can pierce even the strongest gardening gloves. Nettles can sting. Having antiseptic wipes or antiseptic cream and plasters at hand is sensible.
13. Consider having a tetanus vaccination. Tetanus is a bacterial infection which can result from a contaminated wound. The bacteria are present in soil, so be careful if you cut yourself and get dirt in the area. Tetanus can cause sweating, arching of the back and neck, problems with swallowing and breathing and abnormal heart rate and blood pressure. Vaccination will prevent any occurrence, but if symptoms are identified and you are concerned then consult a medical professional.
14. Basic hygiene is equally important in staying healthy when gardening. Always wash hands after gardening, and remove any dirt that has crept under nails.
15. Wear gloves if you are using any chemicals.

## **Accidents**

The risk of accidents in the garden can be minimised by taking simple actions and planning ahead.

When landscaping a garden, for instance:

- Make sure that paths are kept free from any obstructions. There should be no broken slabs sticking up which could cause someone to trip.
- Use non-slip surfaces.
- Remove leaves and algae from paths before they make it slippery.
- Watch out for overhanging branches and cut them back if they become a problem.
- Steps should be clearly identifiable. This is easily done by using a change in the colour scheme of plants around them, or by using white stones or a strip of white paint at the edges. At night, consider illuminating steps with a small solar light.
- Planting needs to be undertaken with equal care bearing in mind the needs of the garden users. If you have young children, extra care has to be taken. Avoid planting thorny plants such as pyracantha or roses near play areas because these can be painful if a child falls on them. Some plants such as laburnum are poisonous and should be avoided until children are older and aware of what they can and cannot eat around the garden. If you have inherited a garden with mature plants and lots of berries it is a good idea to remove all the berries that are within a child's touching distance. Another problem that must be borne in mind is that some plants can irritate the skin. Some people will be allergic to them, others will not.

## **DANGER: Plants that pose potential dangers in a garden**

**Aconitum napellus (Monkshood or Wolfsbane):** A tall growing perennial, it has pretty blue flowers. Unfortunately, all parts of the plant contain poisons that can be fatal if eaten or absorbed through the skin.

**Cortaderia (Pampas grass):** The leaves on this plant are very sharp and have rough edges that can cut hands.

**Cupressocyparis leylandii (Leyland cypress):** Skin irritation can be caused by contact with the sap when pruning, or by inhaling the smoke when green, newly cut prunings are burned.

**Daphne laureola (Spurge laurel):** All parts of the plant are toxic.

**Dieffenbachia (Dumb lane):** Breathing difficulties can result if any part of the plant is eaten as it causes the mouth, tongue and throat to swell. The sap in both plants causes skin rashes.

**Fremontodendron (California Glory):** Skin irritation and itching can result.

**Laburnum (Golden Rain):** This is a very pretty tree with delicate branches and long sprays of yellow flowers. The twigs, seeds and leaves are poisonous.

**Lupin:** A popular perennial plant found in many gardens, it has tall, upright flowers in many colours. The seeds and leaves are poisonous.

**Primula obconica (German primula):** Most people can handle these plants with no problem, but occasionally some people can experience skin rashes and itching. Some people can experience severe dermatitis.

**Pyracantha:** The berries are poisonous. It has very long and sharp thorns.

**Ruta graveolens (Rue):** When it is sunny, the grey leaves can cause redness, itching and skin blisters which can last several weeks. A further problem is the milky sap, which can cause a serious reaction.

**Schefflera (Umbrella tree):** Contact with cut leaves or stems can cause rashes.

**Taxus baccata (Yew):** The berries on this plant are poisonous.

**Wisteria:** A bluish/purple flowered spring climber, it is often found adorning house walls. All parts of the plant can cause harm if eaten.

**Yucca filamentosa (Yucca):** This plant has stiff, needle sharp leaves which grow at child height. Even running your fingers down the sides of a leaf can cause painful cuts.

**NOTE:** If you are unsure about the identity of plants in your garden, obtain a plant directory from your local library or look them up online. Try the Royal Horticultural Society Plant Selector for starters, available here: <http://apps.rhs.org.uk/plantselector>.

## **Electrical safety**

Using electrical tools of any kind involves a risk, but it can be minimised if sensible precautions are taken.

- Always use a residual current device (RCD) in conjunction with any electrical equipment. This will stop the flow of electricity if a wire is cut, otherwise you run the risk of experiencing an electric shock.
- When using an extension cord to lengthen the reach of a power tool, bear in mind that the power of the tool will decrease the further it is away from the mains plug.

- Do not use electrical products such as lawnmowers or hedge trimmers in wet or damp weather. Electricity and water do not mix!

### **Water features**

Water features can be an aesthetically pleasing and relaxing addition to any garden, but they do pose a risk to children who can drown in just a few centimetres of water. So, if you have children or grandchildren who regularly play in your garden, follow these tips:

- Wherever possible, it is best to avoid having a pond in the garden, but this is not always practical as there may be a natural pond or stream running through your garden. Filling in such a stream or pond is also not a good idea as this could affect drainage and lead to flooding.
- For small ponds, a metal mesh cover can be fixed in place to prevent children falling in. The cover can be removed whenever you need to undertake any maintenance of the pond. The open mesh will allow you to feed fish and the children can safely watch the fish in the pond through the mesh.
- Large ponds should be fenced off so that children cannot reach them. Some gardens have a naturally high water table so that temporary ponds form whenever there has been heavy rain. This is particularly evident in areas close to rivers and lakes, which form part of the natural flood plain. Such ponds are essential for drainage and in reducing the risk of your home flooding, but of course any such water can pose a temporary danger to children. It is worth considering growing bog plants in affected areas as these decrease the risk from the presence of surface water. The bog plants will help soak up excess water and provide a barrier between any surface water and the rest of the garden. Children will also be less likely to rush into the water if there are plants in the way.
- When choosing a water feature consider a millstone or ball where the water trickles out of the top. The result is that there are never more than a few millimetres of water present on the surface. Children enjoy playing with the water, allowing it to trickle through their fingers as it comes over the stone. The water drains down into an underground tank, and is constantly recycled via a pump. Such features can be turned off when necessary.
- If constructing a new garden, consider building a sand pit for the children, which can be turned into a pond when the children are much older.

**NOTE:** No matter what type of water feature you have in the garden, it is important always to watch carefully when children are playing nearby. Water can also make paths slippery and covers can be accidentally dislodged.

### **Wasp stings**

Stings – especially wasp stings – can be extremely painful, and in rare circumstances can kill. Although wasps are found in the garden for much of the year, the big problem starts around midsummer and lasts until the autumn when the larvae hatch. Until this point, the adult wasps have been feeding on a sweet liquid dispensed by the larvae. New queens and male wasps fly away and create new nests. The adult wasps begin to starve and seek new sources of food from bins, tables, vegetable plots, gardens and orchards. They become much more aggressive and are more likely to sting at this time.

Installing wasp deterrents – such as the Waspinator – can discourage wasps from coming near your garden to help reduce the problem. It is also possible to install traps to catch and kill wasps. The drawback is that these have to be emptied at regular intervals.

If a wasp nest is found in the garden, it is best to keep clear. Call in a pest control officer from your local council to deal with it. There may be a nominal charge, but it will be removed safely at no risk to you.

Hornets and bees can also sting, and sometimes it can be very hard to identify the different types of stinging insects. These stings can cause similar toxic reactions, but hornets and bees tend to pose a much less serious problem than wasps, which are much more aggressive.

If a wasp or similar insect stings you, you must take immediate action. Such stings are very painful and will result in a red, swollen area around the sting. You should keep a wasp sting preparation in your first aid kit and it should be used immediately once stung. In an emergency, lavender oil or ice cold water can help, or use a bag of frozen vegetables to bring down the swelling as quickly as possible.

If you think that you or anyone else who has bitten is experiencing an allergic shock – medical help should be sought urgently. Such a situation is extremely serious.

Allergic shock can set in after only a few minutes or it can happen slowly over a period of around three hours. There are numerous symptoms. Sweating, shallow breathing, nausea, faintness, clammy skin, tiredness, swelling and difficulty in focusing on anything are the initial signs. After this stage, fainting and swelling around the throat can make breathing difficult. In very severe cases, the person may go into a coma and death can result if action is not taken quickly. In short, seek medical attention if you are at all concerned about a possible allergic reaction to a wasp sting.

**Further information:** The NHS website has more information on symptoms and treatments for insect bites and stings: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Bites-insect/Pages/Introduction.aspx>.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Gardening for all**

Gardening is truly a pastime for all, with able bodied and disabled people, as well as those with health issues, all able to play an active part in shaping their environments and creating gardens that can offer opportunities to improve fitness and wellbeing. Below we look at a few ways in which gardening can achieve all these outcomes for disabled people and those with mental health problems.

For more detailed information and further advice, we recommend the fantastic team at Thrive – a UK-based charity that helps people with a disability to start or continue gardening. Visit [www.carryongardening.org.uk](http://www.carryongardening.org.uk) to find out more.

#### **Gardening for those with mental health problems**

Mind, the British charity for better mental health, published a report in 2007 (Ecotherapy: the green agenda for mental health, [http://www.mind.org.uk/assets/0000/2138/ecotherapy\\_report.pdfv](http://www.mind.org.uk/assets/0000/2138/ecotherapy_report.pdfv)) in which it campaigned for ecotherapy to be recognised as a clinically valid treatment for mental distress.

For the purposes of the study Mind surveyed 108 people who were involved in green exercise activities, including gardening and conservation work, and found that:

- 94 per cent of people stated that green exercise activities had benefited their mental health
- 90 per cent of those surveyed commented that taking part in green exercise activities had benefited their physical health

The evidence clearly suggests that participating in activities such as gardening can substantially benefit health and wellbeing.

With this in mind it is safe to assume that gardening and being outdoors can have a positive impact on individuals who suffer from mental health problems such as dementia or Alzheimer's.

Indeed, the Alzheimer's Society ([http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/documents\\_info.php?documentID=90](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=90)) references several benefits for both the person with dementia and their carer, including sharing an activity that both parties can enjoy and discovering new activities that can stimulate a person with dementia.

The Alzheimer's Society also notes that reminders of the past are key and if someone has been keen on gardening before then undertaking simple tasks such as weeding, potting and transplanting will often stimulate memories and improve their mental state. Even the plants they are handling can have a similar effect, especially if they have fragrant flowers or leaves that evoke events and places from the past.

Thrive, meanwhile, has also conducted research into gardening and its effect on emotional wellbeing (<http://www.carryongardening.org.uk/gardening-to-improve-your-emotional-wellbeing.aspx>), finding that gardening can:

- help people through a specific period of difficulty in their lives
- help you get back on top of things and restore balance when it feels like your life is veering out of control
- help you feel happier, more confident and healthier

If you'd like to help someone you know with dementia to discover the benefits of gardening, here are a few tips:

- Equipment should always be placed in clear sight so that there is no risk of confusion as to where it is.
- Keep options limited and make sure that there are not too many choices to be made as this can lead to confusion.
- Give simple instructions. Only deal with one step at a time.
- Be aware that periods of concentration may be limited so the carer may have to suddenly take over and complete a task.

Log on to [www.carryongardening.org.uk](http://www.carryongardening.org.uk) to find out more.

### **Gardening from a wheelchair or seated position**

Here are some top tips for enjoying your garden if you plan to work in it from a seated position or wheelchair.

- Be prepared. Take a bit of time to get yourself ready before you start your work
- Make sure you have all that you need at easy reach. Put a ledge along the top of raised beds, for example to provide a place where tools and plants can be placed safely within reach
- Rethink your garden layout to make it easier to work from a seated position, consider:
  - Raised beds
  - Containers
  - Suitable paths
  - Ramps where necessary
  - Low maintenance plants (Thrive has a great plant guide to help with this: <http://www.carryongardening.org.uk/plant-guide.aspx>)
- Choose the right tools for the job. Long handled tools are perfect for digging and cultivating from a seated position

For much more information, visit Thrive's fantastic website:  
<http://www.carryongardening.org.uk/gardening-sitting-down-and-from-a-wheelchair.aspx>.

### **Gardening for the blind and partially sighted**

The Royal National Institute of Blind People, working in partnership with Thrive, have produced a wonderful booklet on gardening for partially sighted and blind people, it can be found here:

<http://www.rnib.org.uk/livingwithsightloss/leisureculture/homeleisure/Pages/gardening.aspx#H2Heading1>.

Some top tips to help you make the most of your garden if you are blind or partially sighted include:

- Get to know your garden. Take time to walk around your garden at different times of the day and familiarise yourself with its layout, noting points of reference such as the washing line.
- Set down a sound beacon or small radio at the area where you begin work, this will help you to establish where you began and how far you have progressed.
- Plan the job you are going to do, ensuring you have the right tools etc.
- When pruning: Tie a marker around a branch. This will indicate where pruning began. Touch will enable you to make comparisons of branch length, and identify when the whole shrub has been pruned.
- When planting: Bulb planters can be used to create holes for planting perennials, annuals and vegetable plants as well as bulbs. To use a planter all you have to do is push it into the ground. As it is lifted out, it brings a core of soil with it. The plant can be placed in the hole allowing the soil held within the planter to fill in any gaps.
- Judging distances: Distances for smaller plants and seeds can be judged by using a knotted rope. Place the rope on the ground within the desired planting area. Put a heavy stone on top to prevent it moving. Lay the rope out until the end of the planting area is reached. By feeling along the rope, you will encounter the pre-made knots at specific distances. These knots will indicate where a hole can be dug and a seed or plant placed.
- Ensure that flower or vegetable beds can be reached from all four sides. All flowers and vegetables should be at no more than arm's length from the path. If an established bed is very large, add some extra paths to make a way through it.
- Most types of soft fruit such as blackberries and raspberries are available as thornless versions, making it much easier for you to harvest and take care of the plant.
- Always put a cap on top of any stakes to avoid accidents.
- Mowing a lawn is best undertaken with a hand mower or cordless electric version. Make sure that there are clearly identifiable boundaries to the lawn and that these can be felt by touch. Moveable sound markers can also help identify direction and when the end of a lawn area is reached.
- Repotting and seed planting in pots and trays can be undertaken as long as all the equipment is laid out so that you know exactly where everything is. Using markers such as straight sticks allows seeds to be laid out in lines within a tray. Seed planting modules are another way you can identify locations for seeds and small plants.
- Seed pellets and pre-wrapped seeds in pads or strips make planting even easier. There are no problems trying to work out planting distances since the pad or strip simply has to be placed on the soil and lightly covered over. Seed pellets are easy to grip and sow. All that you will need is a marker identifying where the seeds are planted.

Again, for further specific information – and to join the National Blind Gardeners' Club if you'd like to – please refer to Thrive's website:

<http://www.carryongardening.org.uk/gardening-for-blind-and-partially-sighted-people.aspx>



## **Chapter 6**

### **Gardening for the older person**

In May 2012 the *Daily Telegraph* in the UK reported that encouraging the elderly to garden could save the National Health Service in Britain a staggering £11,000 a year per person (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/elderhealth/9291222/Getting-elderly-gardening-could-save-NHS-11000-a-year-per-person.html>).

The report focused on the findings of a pilot study in London which matched 46 older people with younger local residents who were keen to garden, but who lacked the gardens to do so. It found that being outside, active and gardening could save the equivalent of £11,000 a year per person in fewer GP and A&E visits, as well as reduce levels of anxiety and depression.

#### **The benefits**

Gardening is a fantastic type of exercise for older people. It can be as gentle or strenuous as you choose and, as we've already mentioned in earlier chapters, it results in a tangible, real-life outcome with the fruits of your labour clear to see in the aesthetic or practical differences you will have made to your garden.

The physical activity involved in gardening can reduce the risk of developing illnesses such as osteoporosis. Growing your own fruit and vegetables, meanwhile, can help financially as well as provide you with a healthy and renewable source of fresh food. In addition, gardening encourages the use of motor skills such as walking and stretching. Potential problems with stiff muscles can be eased by regularly undertaking tasks such as sowing, planting and weeding, as these require considerable flexibility.

The mental health benefits of gardening are also proven, as already discussed, and as such gardening can be as much of a workout for your mind as it is for your body. It's no wonder so many medical professionals recommend gardening as a source of rehabilitation.

#### **Competitive gardening**

Some people may regard gardening as a substitute for work once they have retired, even developing a competitive streak and aspiring to grow the best rose, pumpkin or carrots in the district.

Indeed, the *Financial Times* (21 September 2012, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/271940d0-03db-11e2-9675-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2M1cwLi98>) reported that women in the UK are mounting a challenge to the traditionally male-dominated world of competitive vegetable growing. Quoting from the National Vegetable Survey, the FT stated that more people than ever in the UK are participating in a garden retail market that it estimates is worth about £5bn a year.

And why not? Growing even a small amount of vegetables (no matter what size or shape), can help family budgets and provide nutritious food. I find that gardeners also tend to be quite a relaxed group and, by becoming members of local garden clubs, you can have opportunities for a vast range of social activities.

## Considerations for older gardeners

Anyone, old or young alike, can enjoy the health benefits of gardening, but those of more senior years should take a few things into consideration before reaching for the secateurs:

- As we get older our skin gets thinner and more susceptible to sunburn and bruising, so always use a high SPF sun block when in the garden during the summer.
- Work in the garden early in the morning or in the evening. Avoid working during the hottest part of the day as this can cause dehydration, and just won't be as enjoyable.
- Always bend from the knees not the back (this rule applies to all ages).
- When lifting heavy items such as large planters or bags of compost, ask for help rather than trying to do it yourself.

## Check your tools

Even though you have used the same tools for many years, they may not be right for you now. The main areas of concern for many as we grow older include back problems, weak wrists, weak arms and general mobility. Unsuitable and unwieldy tools can exacerbate these physical problems, so invest in some new tools if you need to.

### Look through your tool shed and ask yourself:

- Which tools are truly comfortable to use?
- Do you ever suffer from backache or strained muscles when using a particular tool such as a fork, spade, hoe or rake?
- Does it make you feel more tired? This can happen if the tool is too heavy.
- Are you bending over too much when using a tool?
- Would a longer handle make the job easier?
- Are power tools too heavy to lift or use?

It may be that you need longer length tools to avoid bending, or that a different style of tool may reduce the risk of problems occurring.

All garden cultivation tools come in a variety of sizes. It is important to find the right size for you. If you are using a spade that is too short then you are putting extra pressure on your back. Tall people can obtain extra long tools. Jump on the internet and search for 'extra-long gardening tools'.

Bear in mind as well that there are some tool brands that offer a range of tool heads that can be snapped on to different shaft lengths. This reduces the cost of acquiring tools. All you need is the appropriate shaft to suit your height, and the tool heads required to undertake your chosen gardening tasks.

## Tool tips

- **Make sure that your tools are not too heavy.** Modern tools are generally made of lightweight materials thus making digging and other such activities easier and less risky in terms of injury.
- **Look for tools that have a good grip and fit the size of your hand.** Pistol style grips are ideal for people with weak wrists or arthritic hands.

- **Make sure tools are easily noticeable.** Green, brown or dark coloured tools can be easily lost in a garden, making them a potential cause of accidents. It is all too easy to put down a small hand fork or pruners and lose sight of them. Tools with brightly coloured handles stand out very well. Coloured electrical tape can be wrapped around the shaft of a tool to help identification, but make sure that the tape is not in the way when the tool is being used.

### **Ways to water**

Carrying loaded watering cans from the water tubs to your plants can be heavy and consequently pose a risk of injury. Some gardeners may consequently find it an almost impossible task. If this is the case for you, consider installing a system of soaker pipes. These are simply thin rubber pipes that can be placed throughout flower and vegetable areas. They are connected to the water butt. When the tap is turned on, a trickle of water will flow through the pipe, automatically watering plant roots.

Use plenty of mulch around plants so that the roots remain moist. This will decrease the frequency with which you need to water the plants.

### **A matter of pace**

As we've seen already, gardening is all about pacing yourself. Remember:

- Do not attempt to do more than is comfortable. This will ensure that your body is not overstretched and reduces the risk of injury.
- Give yourself regular breaks for a rest and a drink.
- Set yourself a manageable target to be undertaken each time you garden – do that first, then if you still feel you can continue you will be able to stop when you like and know you have achieved something.
- Be prepared to accept help when necessary. Don't feel you have to do everything yourself. If a task is getting too hard to manage by yourself, look at ways it can be undertaken more manageably. Do you need help to complete it? Would different tools help? Would it help to break up the task into smaller segments and undertake those tasks at different times?

## **Chapter 7**

### **In conclusion: Enjoy your garden**

As we've seen over the pages of this book, research and experience has proven that gardening is good for our health.

The end result is pleasurable in every sense – your body feels better for the physical exercise, your mental health is improved and you benefit from a beautiful environment in which to relax, unwind and escape from the pressures of everyday life. Add to this the potential bonus of home grown fresh food, full of high nutritional content and low on cost, and it's hard to find a reason not to get out there and start gardening.

Just remember to pace yourself and try not to do too much at a time. Choose your tools with care, making sure they are the right height and weight for you. Take sensible safety precautions to avoid or reduce potential problems. Always warm up properly before you start work in the garden, and give yourself time to wind down afterwards.

Most of all, enjoy your garden and the benefits it brings. This is not exercise for exercise's sake – your efforts will have a lasting impact on your health, your wellbeing and your garden.

So put down this book, don your gardening gloves and go for it.

## Discover the world of eLearning with YMCA Awards

If you enjoyed this book, you'll love our fantastic **bitesize online courses**.

Our interactive eLearning courses include a wealth of information on a range of health and fitness topics, and they can be completed in your own time and at your own pace. Whether you're a fitness professional looking to enhance your skills or you're just passionate about your health and want to learn more, you'll find a course for you.

Our range of eLearning covers:

- Weight management
- Principles of fitness and nutrition
- Nutrition for exercise & sport
- Muscles of the body
- Principles of stretching and motor skills
- Energy and nervous systems
- Principles of muscular and cardiovascular fitness
- Cardiorespiratory system
- Bones and joints
- Nutrition & health
- Understanding fats
- Understanding protein
- Understanding carbohydrates
- Understanding vitamins & minerals
- Understanding fluids & hydration
- Understanding the digestive system
- Nutrition guidelines
- Safeguarding Awareness
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.



## Get ready to embrace a whole new you!

Check out the website for more details: [www.ymca.learnupon.com/store](http://www.ymca.learnupon.com/store)