



Gardening and health

Gardening can be good for you

There are many benefits possible from gardening, whether you're growing flowers, herbs in pots or lots of vegetables in the back yard. Eating your own produce can be life enhancing!

There is growing evidence that gardening can help you mentally and physically

Getting your hands dirty, with or without gloves, may help soothe the mind. Recent research from the Netherlands compared reading and gardening for 30 minutes following exposure to stress. The findings indicated gardening provided significant benefit regarding stress relief compared to reading.

There may be benefits regarding depression. A three-month Norwegian study in 2009 suggested that the severity of depression may be reduced and attention improved by horticultural activities.

Daily gardening may reduce the risk of dementia according to a 16-year study of older people in Dubbo, NSW.

The basic activities of gardening require some low impact repetitive physical efforts and the mobilisation of joints. These can assist people of all ages and levels of ability, including when other forms of exercise are difficult. It may be an activity you'll want to continue, particularly once you see the benefits.

For kids too

Gardening can encourage children to have outdoor activities, and help them to balance their screen-based time. It gives a broader range of play and learning activities that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. They may eat a wider variety of foods when they help to grow them.



It doesn't just taste good

Taste and nutrition are likely to be winners with food plants grown at home. You are able to manage the growth, variety and quality of your produce for your personal tastes. People who garden are likely to have a more varied and interesting diet with potentially better health. The plant varieties you grow may improve the useful phytonutrients in your food.

Let's get together

If you choose to do some gardening with others there can be many advantages from community-based activities. Being part of a group of like-minded people doing something enjoyable and useful can be great. The growth of community gardens here and abroad reflects the growing appreciation of gardening as a way to improve one's psychological and physical well-being.

Be prepared and safe

Don't forget to check with your doctor if you have any health issues that may affect your capacity for gardening. Make sure your tetanus vaccination is up to date. Be aware of any potential health risks, including for injuries or when working with certain materials such as potting mix.

Like for any physical activity, it's a good idea to progressively get into it. A bit of stretching can help. Warm up and cool down. Start with gentle tasks. Use correct digging, shoveling, lifting and carrying methods.

There are many tools that can help you garden, whatever your age or ability. With basic precautions, including sun protection, reading the instructions and washing your hands afterwards, you can really enjoy healthy gardening.

Some sources for further reading:

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- Van Den Berg A and Custers M, Gardening Promotes Neuroendocrine and Affective Restoration from Stress, abstract, J Health Psychol January 2011 vol. 16 no. 1 3-11
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- Wakefield S et al, Growing urban health: Community gardening in South-East Toronto, Health Promot Int, 22(2): 92-101
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Further information on this topic

Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network
www.communitygarden.org.au