



It's Gardening Time!

Using Ergonomic Principles to Reduce Injury Risks

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Gardening is a popular hobby in America. According to the National Gardening Association, 42 million households grow their own food. Gardening is a healthy, stimulating physical activity that can be enjoyed by all. It's a great way to spend time outside. However, it requires a lot of standing, stooping, kneeling, bending, lifting and crouching. Many of these positions held for a long period of time increase physical stressors and result in unwanted aches and pains that can lead to an injury.

What can we do to reduce injury risks?

Here are some tips that will allow you to safely enjoy gardening season.

- **Warm up and cool down.**

- Gardening is exercise! It's important to treat your body just as you would when you go for a run or play in a soccer game. Do a quick 10-minute warm up prior to doing any yard work. Then, at the end of your gardening, cool down your body with light stretching to prevent stiffness and pain.

- **Keep your back straight.**



- Use long handled tools or add extensions to decrease stress on your back. Long handled tools should be as tall as you are to prevent unnecessary bending in your back. Always "hinge" at your hips and do not bend at your waist.
- Use the hip hinge principles when lifting. Bend at your hip and knees, keeping your back straight.

- **Kneel on one knee at a time.**

- Kneeling on both knees increases the likelihood of rounding your back, which causes excess strain and pain. Kneeling on one knee promotes a straighter spine. Be sure to use knee-pads when kneeling to avoid knee problems! If kneeling is too painful, regardless of the position, then try using elevated planters. It's important to hinge at your hips and not round your back (as demonstrated in the picture) at the waist when seated and working.

- **Use a garden cart.**

- Invest in a garden cart. A garden cart is ideal for working, cutting, trimming, and manicuring your gardens allowing you to work efficiently, hinging at your hips and keeping your back straight.

- **Change position frequently.**

- It's recommended that you change position every 15-30 minutes to prevent fatigue and injury. Take frequent breaks to stand, stretch, and hydrate. Switch hands frequently when pruning or weeding. This prevents repetitive stress and overuse of muscles, which can lead to tendonitis. More importantly, listen to your body. If you are feeling tired or sore, STOP! This is our body's way of warning us that it's time for a break.

- **Use lightweight tools with large, cushion grips.**

- Small handles increase stress on wrists due to excessive movement. Over time, repetitive strain injuries, such as carpal tunnel may develop. Using properly fitted tools with larger, cushioned handles keeps your wrist in neutral (not bent or flexed) and utilizes the strength and power from the shoulder, instead of your forearm. It's also important to wear gloves to protect your hands and provide a barrier to reduce hand injuries and contact stress when using garden tools.

Applying the above ergonomic gardening principles will allow you to feel better, garden more safely, and reduce injury risks.

Happy gardening!

