

For Your Health

Pull Your Weeds, Not Your Back, To Make Your Garden Grow



As springtime approaches, weather warms up and leaves turn green, many people will spend more time outside planting bulbs, mowing the lawn and pulling weeds. Gardening can provide a great workout, but with all the bending, twisting, reaching and pulling, your body may not be ready for exercise of the garden variety.

Gardening can be enjoyable, but it is important to stretch your muscles before reaching for your gardening tools.

The back, upper legs, shoulders, and wrists are all major muscle groups affected when using your green thumb.

"A warm-up and cool-down period is as important in gardening as it is for any other physical activity," said Dr. Scott Bautch of the American Chiropractic Association's (ACA) Council on Occupational Health. "Performing simple stretches during these periods will help alleviate injuries, pain and stiffness."

To make gardening as fun and enjoyable as possible, it is important to prepare your body for this type of physical activity. The following stretches will help to alleviate muscle pain after a day spent in your garden.

Garden Fitness Stretches

- Before stretching for any activity, breathe in and out, slowly and rhythmically; do not bounce or jerk your body, and stretch as far and as comfortably as you can. Do not follow the no pain, no gain rule. Stretching should not be painful.
- While sitting, prop your heel on a stool or step, keeping the knees straight. Lean forward until you feel a stretch in the back of the thigh, or the hamstring muscle. Hold this position for 15 seconds. Do this once more and repeat with the other leg.
- Stand up, balance yourself, and grab the front of your ankle from behind. Pull your heel towards your buttocks and hold the position for 15 seconds. Do this again and repeat with the other leg.

- While standing, weave your fingers together above your head with the palms up. Lean to one side for 10 seconds, then to the other. Repeat this stretch three times.
- Do the "Hug your best friend." Wrap your arms around yourself and rotate to one side, stretching as far as you can comfortably go. Hold for 10 seconds and reverse. Repeat two or three times.

Finally, be aware of your body technique, body form and correct posture while gardening. Kneel, don't bend, and alternate your stance and movements as often as possible to keep the muscles and body balanced.



When the Bulbs Are Planted...

If you already feel muscle aches and pains and did not complete the warm-up and cool-down stretches, there are ways to alleviate the discomfort. Apply a cold pack on the area of pain for the first 48 hours or apply a heat pack after 48 hours, and consider chiropractic care.

Chiropractic Care Can Help...

If the pain persists, consider spinal manipulation. The goal of a doctor of chiropractic is to manipulate the spine and help stimulate your body's natural healing process.

Chiropractic in Cyberspace...

If you like to surf the Net, check out the American Chiropractic Association's Web page. Not only can you find a doctor of chiropractic near you, but you can learn about the history of chiropractic, exercises to avoid spinal problems, chiropractic education and important studies about the effectiveness of chiropractic care. Visit us today at <http://www.acatoday.com>.

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Prevention is Key!

The best way to fight the pain, emotional stress, and missed work that may accompany a spinal problem is to prevent it from happening in the first place. The following tips will help you identify and eliminate "spinal stressors" and incorporate spinal health into your daily routine.

At the office:

- Make sure your chair fits correctly. There should be 2 inches between the front edge of the seat and the back of your legs. Sit with your feet flat on the floor, with your knees at a 90-degree angle. If you can't sit that way, use an angled or elevated footrest.
- Take periodic stretch breaks. Clench your hands in a fist and move your hands like this: 10 circles in, then 10 circles out. Put your hands in a praying position and squeeze together for 10 seconds and then "pray" with the backs of your hands together, fingers pointed downward for 10 seconds. Spread your fingers apart and then bring them together one by one.
- Hold the telephone with your hand or use the speakerphone. Don't cradle the phone between your ear and shoulder. This can lock up the spinal joints in the neck and upper back, and eventually cause pain.

Playing Sports:

- Warm up slowly before a game. Do calisthenics, flexibility exercises, or light running to increase your heart rate.
- When sweat beads form, your body is at the proper temperature to stretch the tendons and muscles.

At Home:

- When you wash the dishes, open the cabinet beneath the sink, bend one knee, and put your foot on the shelf under the sink. Lean against the counter so some of your weight is supported in front.
- When resting or watching TV, don't use the sofa arm as a pillow. The angle is much too sharp for the neck.
- Don't bend from the waist when you lift a child. Squat with your back straight. Keep the child close to you and use your legs and arms to lift.

In the Yard:

- If you shovel snow, push the snow straight-ahead. Don't try to throw it and walk it to the snow bank. Avoid twisting and turning motions. Bend your knees to lift when shoveling. Let your legs and arms do the work, not your back. Take frequent rest breaks to take the strain off your muscles. Try to stand as erect as possible.
- When raking leaves, use a scissors stance: right foot forward and left foot back for a few minutes; then reverse, putting your left foot forward and your right foot back. Bend at the knees, not the waist, as you pick up leaves or grass from the grass catcher. Make piles small to decrease the possibility of back strain. For mowing, use your weight to push the mower. Whenever possible, use ergonomically correct tools for the job.



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Finding a Doctor of Chiropractic

If you do not know a doctor of chiropractic in your area, call the American Chiropractic Association (ACA) at 800/986-4636 for a free list of chiropractors near you or write to us at: 1701 Clarendon Blvd., Arlington, VA 22209.