

## ***Spring's favorite pastime...Gardening***



Listening to the concerns of my clients for almost 10 years has given me sympathy for all who struggle to live a balanced day-to-day life incorporating enough time for work, family and healthy endeavors like exercise. As a trainer, it is my job to provide my client with encouragement, fresh ideas and opportunities to guarantee that time for exercise is set aside. I have always believed that more people would exercise if they could easily include it into their daily routines. For example during the Fall and Winter months my husband is prohibited from going near a rake or shovel because I find both raking and shoveling exhilarating exercises that do not trap me indoors. So, as Spring '09 ushers in I am forced to think about how even I will fit more of these hours into my busy week. Thus I ask you this question, have you ever thought about how gardening can produce a healthier you?

We know we get nutritious foods from the harvest of our own garden but if we break down the elements of gardening as digging, weeding, trimming shrubs and mowing the lawn it is certain that we can expect to get additional benefits. In fact gardening can expend the same energy as other physical activities such as walking, cycling, swimming and aerobics. If people could spend just 30 minutes a day hoeing, weeding, planting or mowing, significant health benefits would be obtained such as decreasing the risk of high blood pressure and diabetes, as well as contributing to stronger bones, muscles and joints. If you doubt that gardening is a viable exercise simply take a glance at the calories burned during common gardening activities:

Calories burned during 30 minutes of the activity for a 180-pound person:

- Watering lawn or garden 61
- Mowing lawn (riding) 101
- Trimming shrubs (power) 142
- Raking 162
- Bagging leaves 162
- Planting seedlings 162
- Mowing (push with motor) 182
- Planting trees 182
- Snow thrower (walking) 182
- Trimming shrubs (manual) 182
- Weeding 182
- Clearing land 202
- Digging, spading, tilling 202
- Laying sod 202
- General gardening 202
- Chopping wood 243
- Gardening with heavy power tools 243
- Mowing lawn (push mower) 243

I see the Summer of 2009, with its economic upheaval, as an opportune time to get back to basics with some of our physical pursuits and gardening can be a big part of that. However, does the beginning of gardening season signal the beginning of sore muscles and a tired back? Why not prepare for the season with a little "spring training and gardening basics 101?"

One of the biggest mistakes many gardeners make is the failure to stretch before and after their endeavors. Because many people do not equate gardening with exercise, they forget to prepare their muscles for the task and instead jump right in. This common yet costly mistake often results in muscle soreness and unnecessary injury.

For example gardening often requires twisting movements when reaching for tools or bagging leaves. Thus it is essential to bend your knees while raking, or use a crate that requires you to step up and down as you move from one flower bed to the next. Other tips to consider especially if you spend time gardening on your knees: use a cushion; keep your back straight and don't sit on your heels; use a lightweight, long-handled shovel or spade, and don't overload it; and last, bend at the knee and step forward as you raise and dump each shovel full of soil.

Now is the time to establish an effective routine that includes a warm up, stretching and strengthening component. Take time to practice it over the next few weeks before heading outdoors. Focus on trunk rotation, the back/shoulder complex, the chest/shoulder complex, legs, hips and low back. Also important are corrective postures and loading principles. Last, when stretching, hold the position for a minimum of 30 seconds. Do not bounce or perform quick movements. Move in a slow, controlled manner. Move until you feel a slight resistance, then hold that position.

For additional information or to inquire about gardening exercises or stretching routines to do at home email [corrinn@fitnessmatters.com](mailto:corrinn@fitnessmatters.com) today!

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