

Newsletter

March 2007

Pull your Weeds and Not your Back while Gardening

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With springtime here, gardening is one of the most common outdoor activities that many take part in. It is a great way to get outdoors to enjoy the fresh air, the hot beating sun all while getting a great workout. However, gardening and yard work can be very demanding on the body. All that digging, raking, pruning, weeding, lifting, planting and watering can cause significant strain to the muscles and back. The good news is that injuries can be prevented.



Working in your yard or garden can be very enjoyable and not only will it produce a beautiful garden but it will also strengthen muscles and burn calories. While you are weeding and raking, mowing and planting it effectively works every major muscle group, low back, upper back, shoulders, legs etc. Typically, 30 minutes of raking leaves burns 162 calories, weeding or mowing can burn up to 182 calories and digging garden soil will burn 344 calories. In addition to burning calories, gardening can offer other health benefits such as stress reduction and increased flexibility.

Any form of exercise, such as gardening can pose some risks. You can easily develop muscle strain and soreness if you go at it too hard, too soon. Pulling weeds, raking a lawn or just digging a hole can strain the back in painful ways, and frequent squatting and kneeling isn't always the best for your back either. Any movement that requires lifting, twisting or turning, for example, carrying bags of mulch, soil or fertilizer can injure back muscles. In fact, gardening and yard work are the number one causes of back and/or neck pain in the spring and summer months.

Gardening can be a serious workout and that is why it is important to encourage people to treat it like any other kind of exercise. Warming up before digging in, and using the proper techniques and tools can go a long way to letting people enjoy the final results of their garden without the aches and pains.

If you are like many Canadians, your eagerness to get the job done may outweigh your attention to how your body will feel when you're finished. The British Columbia Chiropractic Association (<http://www.bcchiro.com>) has developed tips to prevent back and muscle pain that often accompany a strenuous work-out in the yard.



Tips and Preventative Techniques for Getting Back to Gardening

- Take a short 10-15 minute walk around the block or march on the spot for 5 minutes. Lift your knees high and gently swing your arms for maximum benefit.
- Stretching will help prevent recurrences of spinal and related health problems.
- Avoid prolonged bending, pushing and pulling while raking and hoeing, which can strain shoulders or the lower back.
- Use long-handled tools, or the resulting forward and sideways bending can aggravate the neck or lower back.
- To avoid strain and muscle spasm on one side of the body, switch hands frequently while raking or hoeing.
- When using a hedge trimmer, keep your back straight and use short strokes to avoid upper arm and neck strain. Pause after three to five minutes.
- Carry medium-to-small sized loads of debris close to your body, or use a wheelbarrow to avoid strain on your back. Kneel with pads to perform tasks, rather than bend. Keep overhead work to five-minute episodes.
- Avoid extreme reaching with one arm.
- Finally, if a task seems like too much work, it probably is. Hire a professional for tasks like landscaping, tree-topping or trimming large hedges.

Stretch before you start!

Use the right tools, and the right moves!

Bend your knees to lift with ease!

Take a break before it aches!

If you do experience stiffness or soreness after gardening, apply ice to help reduce the swelling and stay as mobile as you can. Do not use heat immediately as it will only aggravate muscle and joint inflammation. The first 48 hours apply ice, after that you can use heat. If your pain persists more than a couple of days, consider consulting a Chiropractor to help you feel more like yourself.