

Gardening for Your Health



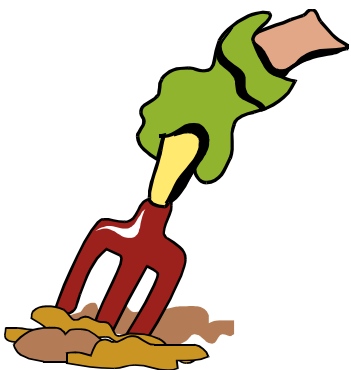
In our busy, fast paced society, many people are seeking ways to achieve a healthier lifestyle through exercise, stress reduction, and improved eating habits. Gardening can be a perfect fit, and your efforts are rewarded with fresh flowers that lift your spirits and fresh vegetables that nourish your body. Although the health benefits of gardening are rarely what motivates those who pursue it, gardening does enrich the mind, body and soul.

Physical Activity

Healthy living begins with good diet and exercise and gardening provides both. From turning the soil to harvesting your crops, working in the garden gets you outside and on your feet. The level of activity you engage in is entirely up to you and depends on the size of your garden, the techniques you employ and what you are growing. As soon as the snow melts, you can find plenty of early season garden chores to help you burn calories. Think of your garden as an outdoor gym that provides aerobic and cardiovascular activity for heart and lungs, strength-building activity for muscles and bones, and stretching and flexibility activity for joints, tendons and ligaments. Here are a few tips to make your time in the garden more physically productive:

45 minutes of vigorous lawn or garden work will burn as many calories as 30 minutes of aerobics. Activities like raking and weeding can burn about 200 calories per hour (or more if done energetically). 30 minutes of

Try to engage in several different activities while gardening, and be sure to change your body position gardening a day lowers blood pressure and cholesterol and helps prevent diabetes, heart disease and osteoporosis.



Using hand tools, lifting a wheelbarrow, pruning trees and shrubs all improve muscle tone and strength. Make your activities more physically challenging by using manual tools instead of power equipment. Turning your soil with a shovel instead of a rototiller will help you burn three times more calories!

regularly to keep from getting stiff. Stand up and stretch frequently to prevent stiffness if you are kneeling. When lifting heavy items, always keep your back straight and use your legs. When digging, bend your knees and let your legs do

most of the work.

Improved Nutrition

Growing your own fresh fruits and vegetables is a great way to improve your diet and increase your nutritional intake. Freshly harvested produce tastes so much better than what is available to us at the market and is chock full of vitamins and minerals. Raw vegetables lose nutrients with time, so anything picked fresh from the garden is bound to be rich with nutrients. Keep freshly harvested vegetables cool to help retain

nutrients. Cooking does destroy some of the Vitamin C in vegetables, but many nutrients are heat-stable and aren't affected by cooking. Most home and community gardeners raise their food without the use of pesticides making their harvest even healthier. Produce can be eaten right off the vine, and this can entice even the fussiest child to try fruits and vegetables that they might otherwise avoid.

Stress Reduction & Mental Health

Getting out in the fresh air and sunshine can greatly improve a person's mental health, especially after being cooped up all winter. The short winter days and lack of natural light can cause us to feel down and depressed. Sunlight gives a great dose of Vitamin D and helps to rejuvenate and energize. Get an early start on your gardening by investing in a bank of fluorescent lights. They'll allow you to start seeds indoors, give your tender tubers and bulbs a head start on the season, and even grow fresh herbs and salad greens indoors all winter. As an added bonus, the additional light in the house (not to mention all the nifty little things growing) helps to lift our spirits and wash away the winter blahs.

Gardening does not have to be a major undertaking. Just nurturing a few houseplants can be very relaxing and can help to lower a person's blood pressure. Your efforts can be as simple as tending a few tomato plants in containers or dressing up your home with a flower bed or window boxes. If you have space for a garden plot in your yard or have access to a community garden in your neighborhood, you can really get your hands dirty!

For More Information on Capital District Community Gardens' programs or to make a tax-deductible donation contact:



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