



Ergonomics Advisor

Gardening Ergonomics



Raised garden beds allow a person to work comfortably in a more upright posture.

Courtesy of King County, WA.

Whether or not it's a favorite hobby, many of us spend considerable time each spring, summer and fall, working in the garden and around the yard.

Absorbed in tending the garden, transporting heavy objects, pruning shrubs or mowing the lawn, we sometimes forget that gardening activities — with their bending, reaching, twisting and lifting movements — can wreak havoc with the back, shoulders, hips, knees, wrists and other joints and muscles.

As well, if you injure yourself gardening, you

are likely to take it to your workplace and be uncomfortable there.

Shona Anderson, President of Anderson Ergonomics Consulting, understands that most musculoskeletal injuries that occur during gardening activities can be avoided — if we apply the ergonomic principles we use in the workplace.

Good posture

A neutral spine is the foundation for good posture. Whether in the garden or at the computer, it is important to strive to maintain the three natural curves of the spine (including the lumbar curve) at all times.

Poor posture contributes to back and shoulder pain, impaired balance and muscle fatigue.

Yoga for gardeners

This summer, Anne Cox, a certified yoga instruc-

tor and an avid gardener, launched her Yoga for Gardeners workshop at Functional Synergy, a therapeutic yoga studio in Calgary.

In this two-hour workshop, Anne shows gardening enthusiasts:

- Yoga postures to stretch and open up areas of the body
- Ways to sit, stand and use the back properly
- Positions that can be most comfortable during gardening
- Different poses to strengthen the back
- Ways to bring your attention back to your body (and gardening)
- Poses to help release tight, sore muscles

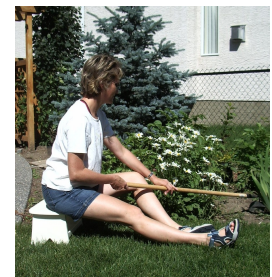
“The ergonomics part of it (the workshop) is how to keep alignment in your spine, so that you're keeping a strong back and don't strain your back when you're gardening,” Anne added.

S-t-r-e-t-c-h

Gardening is classified as low-to-moderate intensity exercise. Warm up before beginning with a 5 min walk and stretching exercises for the neck, shoulders, back, hips, wrists, hands and ankles. Stretch during rest breaks, and cool down afterwards.

Smart gardening

The tips for smart gardening are the same as for physical work in a workplace setting such as an office, factory, warehouse or field site.

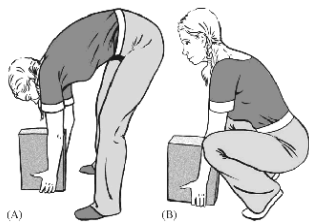


Sitting on a gardening seat to weed, rather than kneeling to grasp, twist and pull out weeds, helps reduce back, knee and wrist strain.



The above "backwards bend" is an excellent stretch for tight back joints and muscles, to counter the forward bending done in most gardening activities.

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Wrong way — Right way to bend and lift

Maintain neutral posture and bend/lift with the knees and NOT the back.

1. Wear comfortable, old clothing, so you need not contort your body to protect your clothes.
2. Change positions regularly. For instance, switch sides when shovelling or raking, to avoid straining one side.
3. Alternate difficult and easy tasks, to allow recovery time for joints and muscles.
4. Limit the duration arms are held above shoulder height to 5 min, then switch jobs.
5. Bend with the knees and not the back, when bending down or lifting.
6. Sit if you have lots of weeding. Squatting or kneeling for long periods may be uncomfortable and hurt the knees.
7. Protect your knees when you do kneel with a pad or knee pads.
8. Reposition your feet or move closer to the job at hand, rather than reaching or twisting excessively.
9. Grasp tools lightly and work with wrist relaxed and in a neutral position (wrist straight, thumb up). This will decrease likelihood of repetitive strain injuries of the wrist, fingers and hand.
10. Use a wheel barrow or wagon to move rocks or other heavy loads.



The Back-Relief Lawn rake sold by Life with Ease has a longer bent handle, which will enable its user to stand more upright and avoid stooping while raking.

The right tools

Simply because the label states a gardening tool is "ergonomic," does not mean it will be the right one for you. Look at what's available and try several before you buy.

Good ergonomic tools may have features for added comfort such as:

- Lightweight construction to reduce fatigue
- Longer handles to permit an upright posture
- Larger, pliable, non-slip grips so you needn't grip tightly

Often you can modify old tools, rather than purchase new ones. For example, try adding padded tape to enlarge grips and using PVC pipe to extend handles.

Tips for Injury-Free Gardening

1. Pace yourself
2. Wear suitable clothing and shoes
3. Stretch frequently
4. Maintain good posture
5. Choose tools wisely
6. Wear gloves
7. Change positions
8. Alternate tasks
9. Take breaks
10. Sit to weed
11. Kneel on padding
12. Avoid reaching and twisting
13. Bend and lift safely
14. Use wheelbarrow
15. Raise garden beds
16. STOP if in pain
17. Develop strong core and legs

Anderson Ergonomics Consulting offers assessments where a Certified Professional Ergonomist will work with you to assess your workstation and your posture, and then make suggestions for improvements. AEC also offers **Ergonomics for Healthy Living**, a seminar in which participants learn how to avoid repetitive strain and back injuries in their everyday lives at home and at work.

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