

Pull Your Weeds, Not Your Back, When Gardening



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. o 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.