

GARDENING

Gardening helps with resolutions to get more exercise

This is the time of year that New Year's resolutions are made. If you are making a resolution to exercise more, you need to know that working in the garden does more than beautify a garden. Gardening can actually make you a happier and healthier person. Adding gardening to your daily or weekly routine can have wonderful health benefits. There have been studies conducted showing the benefits of gardening.

If you are a seasoned gardener, you know about the peacefulness that you get from gardening. Therapists use gardening as a tool to help people cope with anxiety and depression. A Dutch study observed two groups: one would spend 30 minutes gardening while the other group read indoors. The results showed that not only did the gardening group have a better mood, they also had lower cortisol levels. This is a stress hormone that can be lowered when you garden. The study also stated that chronically elevated cortisol levels have been linked to everything from immune function to obesity to memory and learning problems.

Gardening gets you out in the fresh air and the sunshine. As we know, sunshine helps you increase vitamin D. This will allow the body to absorb more calcium, which is important for strong bones. Sunscreen is important to use but make sure you expose your limbs to the sun without sunscreen for



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10 minutes to give you enough vitamin D to reduce the risk of various cancers, heart disease and osteoporosis.

Gardening is a way to achieve a target goal of moderate-intensity exercise, plus it gives you a reward when a task is complete. A Stockholm study showed that regular gardening cut stroke and heart attack risk by up to 30 percent for those over 60. Regular gardening can also prolong life and give you a better quality of life, according to a study of almost 4,000 60-year-olds in Stockholm.

Another study was lead by Dr. Lori Turner when she was at the University of Arkansas. The purpose of the study she said "was to determine the influences of different types of physical activities on bone mineral density among older U.S. women." She and her team of researchers found that women over 50 who worked in the garden at least once a week have stronger bones than their inactive peers. Strengthening muscles and bones is done by all kinds of gardening tasks including digging, pulling weeds, pushing a mower, moving equipment and bags of fertilizer. "Women who garden regularly have higher bone density



Ann Hayes raked leaves in her yard to clean up for Christmas.

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than women who jog, swim or walk" she says. She went on to say that jogging, swimming and calisthenics were weak predictors for high bone density values. Bicycling, aerobics, walking and dancing were moderate predictors for positive bone density. Yard work and weight training were strong and independent predictors for positive bone density. (This is also true for men but this study was done on women since

they have a higher risk of osteoporosis.)

Gardening is an activity where you often spend more time than you had originally planned. You get involved in working and before you know it, you have been there an hour or more. The benefits in helping fight osteoporosis are amazing. Plus, it increases dexterity and strengthens the hands, keeping hand muscles vigorous and agile.

Now, if you are a



Dr. Bob Reynolds works hard each week to improve the landscape around Spartanburg. He volunteers to prune trees that are planted by the Spartanburg Men's Garden Club.

gardener, you know the joys and benefits gardening will give you. The music you hear from the symphony of the birds singing, the smells of the different shrubs and trees and the calm that large trees swaying in the breeze provides. Even though you can measure bone density and levels of cortisol, there are other benefits that cannot be measured, such as the way one personally feels in the garden communicating with nature.

If you are new at this, get ready for a workout. Go slow at first or you might become so tired that you do not want to go out again. Pace yourself. Think about what you will do and don't focus on one job too long. If you are mowing the yard, only do part and go back and finish. If you are weeding, stop and prune awhile. Switch off jobs until you are used to these tasks. Take frequent breaks, drink plenty of water and wear a hat and

sunscreen.

You do not need a green thumb to get the benefits of gardening. There are community gardens and community projects that need volunteers.

In our community, Newt Hardie and the **Tree Coalition** are always looking for volunteers to help clean up an unsightly area. Bob Reynolds with the men's garden club will also put you to work. Hatcher Garden & Woodland Preserve is also looking for volunteers to help.

Join a group and have fun working along side others that are there for the same reason, to enjoy life in the wonderful outdoors and to get some exercise in a pleasant way.

Working in a garden can give you just what you need. Happy gardening everyone!

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