Gardening: An Ageless Activity

Have you always loved the pleasures of tending to your own garden, the smell of fragrant flowers or the taste of a really fresh tomato? Well, you don’t have to give those pleasures up just because you have arthritis or joint issues. In fact, gardening is a great activity for maintaining joint flexibility, bone density, range of motion and quality of life. Researches from the University of Arkansas found that gardening ranks as high as, weight training for strengthening bones.

With creativity and advance planning, you can create a garden that suits your needs. To garden successfully you should assess your abilities and arrange your garden in a way that make your tasks easier and conserves your energy.

As with any activity, be sure to consult your doctor or physical therapist for any precautions you should take before being your gardening activity.

Here are some tips to remember for the best gardening experiences:

- It is important that before you start working outside that you apply sunscreen to the exposed areas of your skin. Also, protect your eyes with sunglasses and/or hat.
- Always, plan to garden during the time of the day when you feel the best, for example wait until afternoon if you have morning stiffness.
- Pace your work and avoid working in the same position or doing the same activity, such as pruning or weeding, for long periods of time. It is suggested that tasks should be switched every 30 minutes.
- Take breaks during your gardening. A 15 minute break every hour will help with stiffness.
- After finishing your gardening activities for the day, you may want to cool down and prepare your body for rest by again doing some gentle stretching exercise and taking a slow stroll around your yard. If you are stiff or sore after gardening, take a warm bath to help relax your muscles or apply some gentle heat or cold to the painful joint region.

The University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service has a program called Agribility, with the purpose of helping Arkansans stay in their gardens for as long as they want regardless of age or physical ability. It provides examples of equipment and methods that have been created to make it easier to work and to get around in the garden.

For more information about this program or garden questions please contact your local Cooperative Extension Agent in your county.

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** Information gained from the Gardening and Arthritis pamphlet from www.arthritis.org