

# Get Back in the Garden

Gardening with Back Pain

## Info Sheet



Just because you experience back pain doesn't mean you have to give up gardening. Use these tips, tools and techniques to optimize your experience in the garden.

### *The right tools for the job*

Make sure your tools are the appropriate size. Choose a hoe, cultivator, and rake that you can maneuver comfortably without bending. Many tools are now available that can help to reduce the back pain associated with gardening.

- Benches and kneelers can help reduce the pain of standing for long periods.
- Watering wands can reduce the stress associated with over-reaching.
- Long-reach garden tools have ergonomically angled handles that keep the hand and wrist in a natural and comfortable position, while the length of the tool eliminates the strain on the back and shoulders.
- Bring the plants to you by raising your workspace from ground level to waist-high with a raised garden bed. This will reduce the amount of bending required to care for your plants.
- Stretching before, during and after gardening will help keep muscles from becoming stiff.



For more information, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service or visit [www.uaex.edu](http://www.uaex.edu)

# Gardening and Back Pain

## Posture

Back pain, whether caused by muscle aches or a herniated disk, can make gardening a difficult task. Knowing how to position yourself correctly when doing garden chores, such as raking, shoveling or hoeing can help prevent the aggravation of a back injury.

### Standing

- Stand with your weight equally distributed on both feet.
- Wear flat or low-heeled shoes if you stand for long periods of time.
- Keep your back straight by tightening your stomach muscles and buttocks, and by doing a pelvic tilt.



### Sitting

- Keep stomach muscles pulled in and maintain the proper curve in your lower back. You can do this by tightening your stomach muscles and buttocks.
- Keep your knees slightly higher than your hips. Use a footstool under your feet, if necessary.
- Don't sit for long periods of time. Stand up and move around periodically to stretch tight muscles and give them a chance to relax.

### Additional Tips

- Long-handled tools can make work easier by extending your reach and reducing the body movement necessary to complete a task.
- Lightweight and small-bladed tools can reduce the amount of load and resistance.
- Stand as close to the work area as possible and use your arms and legs to do the work instead of your back.
- Be conscious of the twisting motion that can be produced when throwing mulch or shoveling soil as it can cause back strains.

### Lifting

- Face your work when lifting or carrying heavy objects.
- Squat and hold the object close to you.
- Straighten your legs to lift the object.
- Get help to lift objects that are too heavy.

