

5 Smart Ways to Get Fit with Gardening

Want to get fit, but short on cash for a gym membership? Love to be active outside, but not a fan of running, biking, or team sports? Here's an inexpensive solution: Turn your yard and garden into a personal fitness center! For more details on these tips, check out www.gardenfitness.com/ or *Get Fit Through Gardening*, by Jeffrey Restuccio

1. Warm up with a walk.

Studies show that 30-45 minutes of active gardening can provide the health benefits of other exercise routines. Since warm muscles are more flexible and less likely to suffer an injury, always start with some aerobic activity. A brisk 5-10 minute walk will warm up your body and give you time to mentally plan your gardening projects for the day.

2. Stretch carefully.

Stretching helps prevent injuries, aches, and pains, while improving flexibility. Use trees, fences, tools, and the ground for support with slow, controlled movements. Hold each stretch for 30 seconds with no bouncing. For example, lie on the ground with knees bent; slowly raise and lower both arms to the ground behind your head; repeat several times.

3. Flex your muscles.

Once your muscles are warmed and gently stretched, you can get down to the heavy lifting of garden work. Start slowly and build up gradually as your muscles get stronger through the season. Muscle building in the garden can include everything from squats for legs and wall pushups for arms to lifting tools, pots, and bags instead of weights.

4. Balance your loads.

For a complete routine, balance the time you work in different positions: sitting, standing, or kneeling. For balanced strength on both sides of your body, alternate right and left arms for raking, hoeing, and shoveling and carry equal loads in both hands. Practice total body balance by walking a straight line heel-to-toe, standing on one foot, or doing side leg raises.

5. Reduce your stress.

Gardening should not be all work and no play. Take time to smell the roses, as well as the parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme. Use these two tips to stay cool as a cucumber in the garden: (1) Water yourself as well as the plants, with a bottle of cold, refreshing water close at hand. (2) Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunscreen, especially between 10 AM and 4 PM.