



Physiotherapists:
The Body Specialists

Physio Tips

GARDENING

Physiotherapy Association of BC

WEED OUT THE SORENESS

Gardening is an active pursuit that can cause muscle strain to the lower back, shoulders, knees and arms. Proper body positioning, well designed gardening gloves and tools along with frequent rest breaks are the key to being a healthy gardener.

Thirty minutes of yard work, planting or raking leaves gives great general health benefits, such as preserving flexibility, increasing mobility and building strength and endurance. However, many people overdo it in the garden.

To be injury free season, Physiotherapists recommend:

Begin with a warm up – Start with easy raking, or go for a five-minute walk to warm up your muscles. Follow this with stretching all major muscle groups to help prevent injury. Give your back, neck, hands and fingers some extra time when stretching.

Be aware of your posture and body mechanics – Move your feet instead of twisting at your waist when sweeping, raking, mulching or potting. If you can't avoid twisting, tighten your stomach muscles in order to protect your back.

Use your legs rather than your back when lifting or unloading heavy bags or pots. Bend your knees, keep your back straight, and hold the object close to your body to prevent unnecessary strain on your back.

Use ergonomically correct tools – Buy tools with long handles to help with weeding. Build or buy a potting bench that is high enough to prevent unnecessary bending. Sit on the ground to trowel without bending over. When kneeling use a knee pad to avoid putting too much pressure on your knees.

Pace Yourself – Don't try to do everything all at once. Take breaks throughout your work and do some gentle stretching to keep limber. Vary tasks to make sure different muscles get used and one particular muscle group is not overworked. Repeated actions that use a specific muscle or muscle group can cause pain or injury.

Raking or hoeing – keep your tools close to your body and your back straight to reduce strain. Use your arms and avoid twisting your trunk. Use long-handled tools suited to your height.

Weeding or planting – do not bend from the waist. Squat or kneel on a kneeling pad or use tools with long handle.

Digging or shovelling – insert the head of the shovel vertically into the ground and step on the blade. Lift small amounts at a time and bend at the knees, using your legs not your back to lift the load. Avoid twisting. Use a wheelbarrow to move big or heavy loads.

Lifting or carrying – know your limits and lift properly: bend your knees, not your back. Keep the load close to your body. Don't lift items that are too heavy for you to handle – get help! Use a wagon or wheelbarrow to transport supplies and / or to move or carry heavy items.

Pruning or trimming – get as close to your work as possible. Don't stretch beyond your reach or past your stable footing. Rehearse the movement as a stretch first to test your ability and positioning.

Physiotherapists are experts in movement and mobility, body mechanics, muscles and joints. They will help develop an exercise program specially-tailored to your needs, putting together the right combination of activities to improve physical fitness and avoid injury.

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