



# A Prescription for Safe Gardening

*Courtesy of:*

- Peterborough Physiotherapy and Sports Injuries Clinic (705) 741-2284
  - Chemong Physiotherapy (705) 292-9888
  - Lindsay Physiotherapy (705) 324-8512
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*It's no secret that gardening as a leisure activity continues to flourish. And although it's one form of outdoor exercise that's very positive for both the mind and body, it can have some health drawbacks, especially related to muscle and joint strains. That's why we're offering some safe gardening advice.*

## **Before Digging In**

1. Make sure you are wearing loose, light-weight clothing that protects from the sun, plus: sun screen, eye shades, gloves and safe shoes.
2. Cheer yourself on with 3 to 5 minutes of gentle stretching first. *Use the stretches illustrated on the opposite side of this page to prevent strain and fatigue in the most vulnerable muscles.*

## **Raking Tips**

1. Give your rake a break! Take frequent breaks to actually hug your rake. This motion rests the back, relaxes muscles and relieves muscle strain.
2. When raking, hold your rake close to your body. This reduces strain on joints, upper back and shoulder muscles – it gives your back a break.

## **Planting Tips**

1. If you have arthritis in your hips or knees, or if you have had recent surgery, enjoy the garden by planting

fashionable flower pots instead of beds. Working at waist level reduces the risk of further joint stress and re-injury.

2. When planting garden beds, use a crouched position. Change the position after 10 minutes. Kneeling on a sponge gardening pad or using gardeners' knee pads will add extra comfort.
3. Use tools with padded handles to reduce joint stress. Wear gloves to prevent blisters.
4. When potting, place the pots in the desired location first. This will help you to avoid heavy lifting. Transfer soil using small containers instead of carrying heavy bags.

## **Weeding Tips**

1. Use a chair or secure prop for support when moving from a standing to kneeling position.
2. Kneel with care and bend from the hips to save your back.
3. Take excess pressure off knee joints by using a sponge gardening pad to kneel on.
4. Stand up and stretch to your greatest height – frequently.

## Moving Tips

1. Take your time and relax. Mowing with a vengeance can result in muscle spasm and pain.
2. Your grip on the mower's handle should be comfortable. A heavy grip results in undue strain and overuse of neck, shoulder and upper back muscles.
3. Respect your feet. Comfortable rubber soled shoes protect your feet and support your entire body.

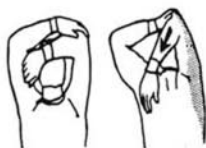
## Suggested Gardening Stretches

Stretching should be done slowly and without bouncing. Stretch until you feel a slight, easy stretch and hold for up to 30 seconds. While stretching you should feel relaxed and focused. By doing the following stretches before you start to garden you will reduce tension on the muscle groups most used for this activity.



### Arms & Shoulders

1. Interlace your fingers above your head with your palms facing upwards. Stretch upwards and you should feel it in your arms, shoulders and upper back. Hold for 15 seconds.
2. Hold onto one elbow with your opposite hand, gently pulling that elbow back behind your head. Hold for 15-20 seconds. Do the same with the other elbow.



3. Shrug your shoulders upwards towards your ears. Hold the shrug for 3-5 seconds, then relax. Repeat this 2-3 times.

### Back, Legs & Hips

1. Position your arm and elbow as shown in diagram 2, but do while standing with knees slightly bent. When you gently pull your elbow behind your head, bend from your hips to the side opposite your elbow. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat this stretch on the other side.



2. Stretch your calf by leaning against a solid support with your forearms. Place one leg forward, bending from the knee with foot flat. Leave the other leg straight, behind you. Slowly move your hips forward until you feel the stretch in the calf muscle of your straight leg. Hold an easy stretch for 30 seconds. Stretch out your other calf the same way.

3. Use a sturdy railing or wall to help maintain your balance. Bend your right knee backwards at a natural angle and hold the top of your right foot with your left hand. Gently stretch by holding for 30 seconds. Switch to stretch other knee and quads.



### Other Important Tips

1. Frequent stretches, plenty of cool drinks, energy breaks and a few minutes of relaxation should be part of your overall gardening activity.
2. Day-long marathons of raking, weeding, planting and mowing will result in tired and stressed muscles.
3. Relax in a hot bath to reduce stiffness at the end of every gardening day.
4. If, after gardening, you suffer from aches and strained muscles try using ice packs to decrease muscle or joint swelling in a specific area. Follow this with a hot bath (every two hours, if possible) in order to increase circulation to the area. Active rehabilitation such as gentle, progressive stretching of muscles relieves pain and soreness.

### For more information contact:

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