

Gardening is fun but can be hard work — pulling weeds, digging holes and carrying dirt, mulch or gravel. But some precautions are needed. You need to guard against sore muscles, back pain and sunburn. When you garden, you should learn about the safe use of equipment and safe techniques for doing strenuous work. Here’s how to make it easier on yourself and those working with you.

**Always remember to:**

- Apply sunscreen, insect repellent and moisturizer before heading outside.
- Do some arm, back, neck and leg stretches before you begin your gardening session, and take stretching breaks while you work.
- Drink fluids to stay hydrated.
- Garden early in the morning or evening to protect against too much sun.
- Start small. If you are new to yard work avoid overworking yourself.
- Remember your back. Bend from the knees, and don’t twist your body. Use a wheelbarrow or cart for hauling.

**And remember not to:**

- Strain yourself by lifting heavy objects, lift smaller amounts and ask for help lifting.
- Hold any one position for too long—Change positions frequently-move around and shake out those muscles

Gardening is fun, rewarding and great exercise. It can also be a great family event. Working together as a family in the yard or garden can be great fun. As an active gardener, you can grow your own fresh fruits and vegetables! Ask you local gardening center about setting up a pot for tomato vines or green peppers. There is nothing better than fresh, homegrown produce to motivate you to eat healthier.

Don’t have a garden? Sign up for a plot at a community garden. Help a neighbor, or volunteer at a local school, religious institution, or other public facilities. Good web sites include: [www.hgtv.com/hgtv/gardening](http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/gardening), [www.garden.org](http://www.garden.org), and [www.kidsgardening.org](http://www.kidsgardening.org).

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