

Gardening, Pull Your Weeds...Not Your Back

By Dr. Pamela Latimer

Gardening can provide a great workout, but with all the bending, twisting, reaching and pulling, your body may not be ready for exercise of the garden variety.

Gardening can be enjoyable, but it is important to stretch your muscles before reaching for your gardening tools. The back, upper legs, shoulders, and wrists are all major muscle groups affected when using your green thumb.

A warm-up and cool-down period is as important in gardening as it is for any other physical activity,"

"Performing simple stretches during these periods will help alleviate injuries, pain and stiffness."

It is important to prepare your body for this type of physical activity. The following stretches will help to alleviate muscle pain after a day spent in your garden.

Garden Fitness Stretches

- Breathe in and out, slowly and rhythmically; do not bounce or jerk your body, and stretch as far and as comfortably as you can. Stretching should not be painful.
- Stand and stretch the fronts and backs of your legs
- Standing, weave your fingers together above your head with the palms up. Lean to one side for 10 seconds, then to the other. Repeat this stretch three times.
- Do the "Hug your best friend" stretch. Wrap your arms around yourself and rotate to one side, stretching as far as you can comfortably go. Hold for 10 seconds and reverse.
Repeat two or three times.

Vary Your Activities

Make sure you don't do an activity so long it creates an injury. Rake for 30-45 minutes, then move to something else and come back later.

- Take a break after several hours, ice, and then resume gardening after resting.

Be aware of your body technique, body form and correct posture while gardening.

- Kneel when you can.
- Bend and lift with your back as flat as possible, wide leg stance, hinging at the hips.
- Alternate your stance and movements as often as possible to keep the muscles and body balanced using both sides of the body when possible.
- If you must twist, try and alternate sides—as with raking.

After and During Gardening

Apply a cold pack on the area of pain even if you think it will go away quickly.

If discomfort is not resolved in 3-4 days give us a call.

Dr. Latimer's scope of practice

I practice a drug-free, hands-on approach to health care that includes patient examination, diagnosis and treatment. Along with 33 years of expertise in treating the musculoskeletal system I have broad diagnostic skills and am also trained to recommend therapeutic and rehabilitative exercises, as well as to provide nutritional, dietary and lifestyle counseling.