

For the Love of Gardening

Exploring the Benefits of Gardening: Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, Spiritual Gardening nurtures the body, mind and soul

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Gardening can be a simple hobby, a plant in your window, a vegetable garden or flower bed, a lifestyle or passion in limitless forms. Gardens are unique, ever changing and can be as unpredictable as the weather.

Part 1: Physical Benefits of Gardening: Health, Nutritional & Environmental Blessings...

Exercise:

Gardening moves one to get out-of-doors, into nature, moving. It's actually an enjoyable, productive form of exercise. Activities might encompass digging, tilling, planting, mulching, hoeing, pruning, picking, etc. While unloading a load of compost, my granddaughter proudly stated, "We're in the poop business."

The benefits of walking/exercise include increased cardiovascular and pulmonary fitness; reduced risk of heart disease and stroke; weight loss; improved management of hypertension and high cholesterol, joint and muscle pain and stiffness, osteoporosis, type II diabetes; energy, mood and relaxation.

Perusing your gardens for whatever reason, enjoying the wonders, retrieving forgotten tools, fortifying yourself with fluids and for me, watering, entails lots of walking. Getting up and down keeps one flexible, lubricates the joints, works the muscles. Squatting is really good, building whole body strength. These various activities/ contortions can be aerobic (or not), strengthening, improve balance and enhance ADLs (Activities of Daily Living).

Precautions:

Don't over-do it. Avoid overexertion in hot weather, stay hydrated and take breaks in the shade. Remember to use good body mechanics to avoid injury. Try some gentle stretching before heading out into the garden. Sunlight is our body's primary source of Vitamin D which helps prevent osteoporosis, cancer and depression. However, too much sunlight can cause skin cancer, so it's important to use sunscreen and protective clothing.

Food for thought:

Growing fruits and vegetables is so rewarding. For a healthy nutritious diet, eat a variety of fruits and vegetables (colors) daily. To improve one's diet, try increasing your intake of fruits and vegetables, which can also help with weight control. Recommendations include eating 5-6 servings of vegetables (one serving equals 1 cup leafy greens, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of cooked or chopped other vegetables or $\frac{3}{4}$ cup juice) and 2-4 servings of fruit (one serving equivalent to 1 medium apple or orange, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of chopped, cooked or canned fruit or $\frac{3}{4}$ cup juice) daily OR make $\frac{1}{2}$ your plate fruits and vegetables.

Sustainable gardening, growing organic food is healthier, free of pesticides, herbicides, GMOs, artificial fertilizers and irradiation, provides enhanced antioxidants, and saves money. Organic or not, fresh produce provides enhanced vitamins, minerals, fiber and great taste. There's nothing better than eating a vine-ripened tomato or other garden delight right out of the garden. Your family and friends benefit and appreciate the fruits of your labor. Support your local farmers' market.

The Bigger Picture:

Plants, landscaping, gardening sustain the world. Gardening can increase community food access and improve the environment. The MdC EMG trial garden provides fresh produce for our community, the Osawatomie farmers' market (Osawatomie lost their grocery store) and Our Father's House, a homeless shelter in Paola for families. Community gardening provides opportunities for folks to experience the benefits of gardening as well provide food for those in need.

Plants, photosynthesis, converting light into chemical energy, helps decrease carbon dioxide and generate oxygen. Local foods are fresher, tastier and more nutritious, decrease transportation costs and that environmental foot print. Organic gardening decreases ground water pollutants and increases natural terrain for pollinators. Sustainable gardening also encompasses composting. Plants reduce erosion, create habitats, promote ecological balance and biodiversity.

Gardening can improve your health and the world's.

We reap what we sow. 