

# Gardening Tips for a Bad Back

March 2016

The month of spring is finally here and the earth is gradually sprouting to life again. Though climate changes vary depending upon location, warmer temperatures means the ground, which may have frozen over in the winter months, grows softer and more yielding to plants. To celebrate these new beginnings, many Americans turn to gardening. After all, gardening provides an opportunity to breathe fresh air, decorate your home and exercise your muscles.

If you suffer from a bad back, this can hinder your gardening abilities. However, it does not mean that you are done gardening for good. In many instances a bad back is simply your body's way of telling you to correct your posture and be more cautious. To help you take the ache out of gardening, we gathered some safety tips to help keep your green thumb alive.

## Prepare Your Body

- **Wear comfortable clothes and shoes** – never garden barefoot or in sandals. You should always wear some sort of shoe that laces up and provides good cushioning and arch support. Also, it's important to always wear socks because they absorb the moisture from sweating so you won't slip. Protecting your feet is the first step to protecting your back.
- **Stretch before you start** – gardening is a strenuous activity, so like a workout, your body needs to loosen up before you start putting it to work. Start by walking around your garden a few times and stretch before you begin. Simple stretches such as clasping your fingers together and lifting your hands high above your head and then down to your toes will help you to warm up your muscles and lubricate your joints.

## Tips for Healthy Posture in the Garden

- **Don't lift heavy objects** –if you must lift something, remember to bend your knees and keep your back straight. Use a wheelbarrow to move objects where possible. In addition, wear belts that support your back if necessary.
- **Use appropriate tools** – If you use gardening tools with handles that are too short or too heavy to allow you to easily reach the areas you need, you will increase the likelihood of straining your back. Instead, try using lightweight tools with long handles or extensions. You can also use a gardening belt to keep your tools easily reachable so that you're not constantly bending over to pick them up off the ground.

- **Take breaks to stretch and rest** – It's never a good idea to stay in one position for too long, especially if you are leaning over or bending down and curving your back. It's recommended to get up and stretch every 30 to 40 minutes. If you feel yourself getting tired, sit down and take a break after you stretch to give your back muscles a chance to recover.

### **Know When to Stop**

If you feel pain when you're gardening, that is your body telling you to stop. The main thing to remember when gardening with a bad back is to break up the work into manageable increments and to continue stretching your muscles throughout the process. You should stay hydrated as well. Just like an athlete needs to cool down after a workout, you should cool down when you're done with gardening work.