
Gardens for all – a health activity

Summary

- Working in the garden is good for reducing stress levels and improving physical fitness.
 - Working in a community garden can give you a sense of belonging.
 - Getting involved can be as simple as going for a walk in a garden with a friend.
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Whether you are a home gardener, a community gardener or a visitor, a garden can be a source of exercise, stimulation and relaxation.

Most people enjoy being outdoors and digging in the soil, creating and watching plants grow. People with disabilities, people who are unwell, older people and children can find it especially rewarding to spend time in the garden tending plants and growing their own food.

Working in the garden provides benefits that include:

- Enjoyment – from the physical activity
- Exercise – improves your endurance, strength, mobility and flexibility, and mental health
- Relaxation – helps you relax and reduce stress levels
- Fresh food – provides you and your family with a healthy variety of inexpensive fresh food.

With a little planning, garden beds, equipment and tools can be modified to make gardening accessible for children, older people and people with disabilities.

Getting involved in gardening can be as simple as:

- Going for a walk in a garden with a friend
- Creating your own small pot garden or larger vegetable garden
- Getting involved in a community gardening group
- Supporting a friend or neighbour by helping to tend their garden
- Volunteering – for example, in a school or public garden.

Gardening improves fitness and health

Most people can benefit from creating a garden – it is an enjoyable form of activity, maintains mobility and flexibility, and encourages use of all motor skills through walking, reaching, bending, digging, planting seeds and taking cuttings.

Gardening improves endurance and strength, reduces stress levels and promotes relaxation. It can also provide stimulation and interest in the outdoors. Just being in the garden can create a sense of well-being.

Learning in the garden

Whatever your age or level of ability, you can enjoy gardening, have fun and develop new skills, including:

- Responsibility – from caring for and tending plants
 - Understanding – learning about cause and effect (for example, plants die without water)
 - Self-confidence – from achieving goals and enjoying the food you have grown
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- Love of nature – from learning about the outdoor environment in a safe and pleasant place
- Reasoning and discovery – learning about the science of plants, animals, weather, the environment, nutrition and simple construction
- Physical activity – which is fun and good for your fitness
- Cooperation – including shared activity and teamwork
- Creativity – from finding new and exciting ways to grow food
- Nutrition – learning about sources of fresh food and how to cook the food you grow in the garden.

Family gardening

By gardening as a family, adults can share their skills and knowledge with children, and family members can learn together. This creates a fun and nurturing environment for everyone, as well as being a source of healthy physical activity.

Children love to grow interesting plants such as sunflowers, tomatoes, strawberries and corn. For younger children, their first activities in the garden may be digging in the dirt and playing with mud. As well as the gardening you do as a family, create a space in the garden that belongs to your children.

Community gardening

Working in a community garden can give you a sense of belonging. The benefits of community gardens include:

- Knowledge sharing
- Social activity – meet local people and develop friendships
- Physical activity
- Participation and communication
- Activities that foster self-help
- Nutritional health
- Supportive environments that promote social inclusion (for example, for frail, older people, people with disabilities, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds)

Gardening and mental health

Gardening is good for your mental health. Simply being in a garden can lift your spirits, particularly if you spend a lot of time indoors.

Gardening with others in a community garden can give you a sense of purpose and drive to achieve an end goal. It also provides a sense of belonging and acceptance for those who may otherwise feel isolated.

Gardening can help with depression in several ways, including:

- Being outdoors in a pleasant environment
- Working with other people and reducing isolation
- Caring for plants and investing in their future
- Experiencing the joy and satisfaction of harvesting produce from the garden

Visiting gardens

Visiting a garden can give you a great sense of well-being. It can relax your mind and help reduce stress levels.

Walking around a garden or park will help keep you fit, which can improve your enjoyment of life. Take a friend or visit with your family to make it a social activity.

Where to get help

- Community or local garden groups
- Horticultural Therapy Association of Victoria Tel. (03) 9836 1128
- Cultivating Community Tel. (03) 9429 3084

Things to remember

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- Getting involved can be as simple as going for a walk in a garden with a friend.

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