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Enjoy Your Garden – Without the Back Pain

The Virginia Chiropractic Association Offers Tips For Pain-Free Gardening

Afton, Va. (May 1, 2007) — Anyone who has spent time tending their garden has most likely also spent time suffering from a sore back, aching joints and muscle pain. In fact, a 2003 Harris Interactive Poll found that after sports, gardening is the leading cause of muscle strains and soreness; 59 percent of those polled experienced muscle pain from gardening.

“Gardening is a great way to enjoy the outdoors but improper technique can lead to painful back strain and injury,” says William B. Ward, DC, CCSP, President of the Virginia Chiropractic Association (VCA). “After a weekend of warm weather, too many of us feel the pain of time spent in the garden.”

To make gardening as enjoyable as possible, it is important to prepare the body for this type of physical activity. The Virginia Chiropractic Association offers these tips to help limit post-gardening aches and pains:

- **Warm up before starting.** Begin by warming-up your muscles. A pre-gardening warm-up, followed by stretching, is viewed as a simple measure to help prevent injury. To begin your warm-up, do five minutes of low-intensity, physical activity such as walking, jogging in place, or riding a stationary bicycle.
- **Kneel, don’t bend.** Avoid squatting and bending as much as possible. Instead, kneel on a soft cushion or a stack of towels. Or, consider raised plant beds for your garden. Raised beds bring the garden closer and eliminate the need for bending to pull weeds or trim plants.
- **Roll heavy objects, don’t carry them.** Use a dolly or wheelbarrow for hauling heavy objects such as bagged mulch or landscaping items. Always load materials using your legs to lift. Grasp objects while squatting, and then lift them by raising your entire body, keeping your weight balanced on both legs and your head held straight.
- **Use a timer.** Become aware of your body’s position by setting a kitchen timer. Bring it outside and set it for 15-minute intervals. Once the timer goes off, take a break and do some stretches or a separate task that uses a different set of muscles. Stretches will help restore blood flow and prevent cramping or muscle spasm from static posture.
- **Look for ergonomic tools.** Before purchasing a new tool, imitate the motions you’ll use in the garden. Make sure the equipment is not too heavy, too short or too long for you to use

comfortably. Also, look for hand tools (such as rakes, hoes and trowels) with foam-covered handles. If a tool is uncomfortable initially, it will most likely feel worse after substantial use.

- **Drink plenty of water.** Sweating depletes your body's water supply and can lead to dehydration if fluids aren't replaced.

“Despite their best efforts, some people will still end-up with stiffness,” Dr. Ward notes. He recommends resuming normal, or near normal, activity as soon as possible and avoiding prolonged bed rest. Application of local ice and heat can also provide relief.

Dr. Ward reminds gardeners to pace themselves. “The joy of gardening is that it lasts all season; there's no need to do everything the first day. Begin with short sessions and gradually increase the length of activity. Pace yourself – your back will appreciate it.”

If you find yourself in significant pain after a day in the garden, consider spinal manipulation from a doctor of chiropractic. Just as your garden needs tending, so does your spine. To locate a doctor of chiropractic near you, visit www.virginiachiropractic.org.

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