

Do a few stretches before and after the gardening - No-one would consider (we hope!) going to the gym without doing a warm-up. You are going to do some moderate physical exercise: prepare your body.

- Stretches will lengthen tight muscles, improve the circulation, oxygen and nutrient flow to the tissues and reduce the build-up of waste products which give you those aching muscles the next day.

Plan your workload - Have several tasks on the go at the same time, but work a little on each every time you go into the garden. Although it is systematic to start and finish each job before going on to the next, your body will much prefer the variety of tasks.

- If your garden is on clay, digging is hard work. Try to do this when the ground is neither too dry and hard, or too wet and heavy.
- Do not try and do the whole vegetable patch in one morning. It may be mentally satisfying, but your back and muscles will find it very strenuous.
- Keep trying to improve the quality of your soil so that it gets easier each year as your body gets older!

Have your lawnmower serviced at the beginning of the season - Shoulder sprains can easily occur from repeatedly pulling ripcord motors that are reluctant to start after a damp winter in the garage.

Pruning - This is a gentle, non-taxing activity... or is it? Again, do this in moderation. Repeated use of the pruning shears on tough stems places a lot of pressure on the forearm muscles and can lead to tennis elbow-type symptoms.

- Use two hands for tough pruning or try alternating left and right hands (that's also good for your brain!).

- Stretching out these forearm muscles will help to prevent lactic acid build-up and reduce muscle soreness.

Consider your equipment.

- If you have problems with your hips, knees or your back, consider the use of long-handled tools. These are now widely available and allow you to weed and hoe from a better position and posture.
- The use of a kneeler will also help reduce pressure through the knees and prevent you stooping over the flowerbed.
- Don't overfill the wheelbarrow or trug. Much better to make an extra journey or two with a lighter load, than to struggle all the way to the compost heap!
- Keep your tools handy – consider the use of a tool belt or bag so that you are not overstretching, twisting and reaching to pick up the trowel.

Many hands make light work – Gardening is a great way to get the whole family out in the fresh air together – a great way to spread the load!

- Lift and carry heavy loads with a partner – remember to bend from your knees when lifting.

Sometimes a little planning and a slight change in the way you have been used to doing things can make a world of difference to how much you enjoy your gardening - and I promise you the plants won't mind!

