



## Gardening Tips

Prevention is the best medicine. Patients often complain about not knowing what created their problem. It's not always what we did, but what we didn't do over time that results in pain. Prevention is easier than fixing a problem after it's broken.

To help ensure a healthy and pain free gardening season, especially in the early spring, here are some simple tips:

1. **Walk and warm up before you start gardening** – Maybe take 10 or 15 minutes to stroll around your yard to survey what needs to be done. While doing so, take long strides to loosen up your pelvis along with making circles with your arms outstretched. Think: muscle fibres are like spaghetti –when they are cold, they are easily damaged; warm they are flexible. Get the blood flowing to loosen up muscles before you begin!
2. **Stretch before and after** gardening activities starting with your larger muscle groups then gradually progressing to the smaller ones. Start with your legs (gluteals, hamstrings, quadriceps), then your back (extension, and lateral bends), arms and shoulders, wrists. **Be careful not to bounce, jerk or strain.** Hold for 15 seconds and stretch both sides three times each.
3. **Take it slow** – Even if you're in good shape, slightly different muscle activity can still make you sore. D.O.M.S. – Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness is common. This is a term used for muscle soreness appearing 24-48 hours after an activity is performed. If pain lasts more than a couple of days or worsens, seek professional help.
4. **Posture, posture, posture** – Posture is a window to your spine. Pause from your activity and realign your posture every 15 minutes, or as soon as you feel discomfort. Keep these key points of alignment in check when realigning your posture: From the front, keep your nose, sternum (breast bone) and umbilicus (belly button) in line; from the side, keep your ear, shoulder and hip in line.
5. **Use the right moves** – Alternate tasks; switch hands; use scissors stance when raking; kneel to plant and weed; do not bend at the waist, bend at the knees; change positions every 15 minutes; pace yourself
6. **Use the right tools** – Lighten your load with the proper equipment (use a wheelbarrow (light weight and 2 wheeled for stability), garden cart, garden hose instead of watering can); carry loads close to body; use ergonomically designed long-handled tools to give you leverage and prevent stooping and twisting. Your tools should fit your body; your body should not have to fit to the tools!
7. **Listen to your body** – If in pain, stop! Walk around and stretch. If pain persists, call it a day. D.O.M.S. takes 1-2 days to be felt so if it hurts right now, something else, besides muscles, could be wrong. Stretch after to prevent excessive D.O.M.S.
8. **Stay hydrated** – Drink lots of water to keep muscles loose and prevent cramping.
9. **Pay attention** to any numbness, tingling, weakness, poor posture or pain. Any of these may indicate it's time for a spinal check up. It may just be muscle pain but it may also be a warning sign of an underlying issue. Don't wait and hope that it will go away, get it checked.