

Spring Gardening Safety Tips

It is that time of year again for gardening season. Gardening is like any other physical activity and it involves a tremendous amount of muscular exertion and because there is so much bending involved, it is especially strenuous on the back and legs. Here are a few tips to make this season a little bit easier on you.

Dos and Don'ts of Gardening

1. It is very important before you start with any activity to properly warm up. This can be done with light movement or a 10-15 minute brisk walk to loosen your muscles and increase your flexibility. Muscles and ligaments are less likely to become injured if they are warm before exertion. Gentle stretching exercises are recommended before and after any strenuous work activity.
2. Avoid prolonged bent over postures especially while standing when performing ground level activities such as weeding. Get down closer to the task by kneeling or sitting on the ground or a gardening bench, rather than bending and twisting from the waist. When weeding get down on all fours or kneel, using one knee at a time and changing frequently.
3. Do not push yourself over your own physical limits. Begin with smaller jobs and work yourself up to the larger ones as you become more conditioned. Know your body and when it is telling you to back off, vary your activities, and take regular rest breaks.
4. When lifting heavy loads or shovelling proper lifting technique should be followed. Rise up by straightening your legs at the knees, not by lifting your torso at the waist. Let your legs do the work and not your lower back. Wall squats are a great conditioning exercise for increasing leg strength with lower risk of knee injury. If the load is too heavy don't overexert yourself get help from somebody else to share the load!
5. Make sure to wear proper clothing and shoes. Your feet should be protected with thick-soled supportive shoes. Don't overdress or under dress for activity. Dress in layers and make sure to wear the appropriate sunscreen for the conditions. Remember that early in the season it is very easy to underestimate the sun's strength. Its better to be overprotected than to have to deal with an unpleasant burn after the fact.
6. Lift dirt and plants by letting your arms, legs and thighs carry the load: bend and straighten at the knees instead of the back and hips. Lift the load close to the body's torso and center of gravity, and handle smaller, more manageable loads at a time.
7. Use long-handled tools to give you leverage to save you from bending when doing activities like digging, raking, mowing or pushing.
8. Switch hands frequently when doing prolonged raking, hoeing or digging actions. This will distribute the load more evenly throughout both sides of the body instead of one side. Repetitive motion on one side can bring on progressively serious joint imbalances and may produce postural misalignments and pain, including muscle spasms in the neck, shoulder, forearms and lower back.

9. Alternate between light and heavy loads. This allows your body to recover while still doing work.
10. Take frequent breaks. Prolonged postures can reduce circulation, restrict mobility and promote strain injuries.
11. Drink plenty of fluids, especially water. Staying hydrated is very important in muscle function during activity and in recovery after.
12. Carry objects close to your body. Keeping the load close to your center of gravity reduces the risk of straining your neck and back.
13. If joint or muscle soreness occurs try resting and relaxation with an ice pack 20 minutes on a full hour off. Never apply ice directly to the skin. Always use a damp cloth between the skin and the ice surface. See your chiropractor if muscle soreness lasts for more than 48 hours or if pain is severe.

If you have any questions check us out at www.coastalhealtharts.com

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