

Gardening as a Form of Exercise

When thinking about different types of exercise, you might not think to include gardening as a workout option. But gardening can provide a wide range of benefits for all ages, based on how intensely you work. For those who have not been active, gardening can get you started with a gentle outdoor activity that involves bending and stretching. For those who want a more vigorous workout, there are many movements that can be done with intensity to amp up your exercise session.



Before you start any exercise routine, a good warm up and stretching session is recommended. Walking or performing any type of aerobic activity for 10 minutes or so is a good way to get your body warmed up for gardening. Since gardening uses most of the major muscle groups, it's important to stretch and loosen your muscles before you start your gardening session, and again at the end of your workout. This will help prevent muscle soreness.

Some simple stretches include this one for the lower back: Sit in a chair and hold underneath your knee, pulling it in toward your chest. Switch sides. Finish the stretch by pulling both knees in toward your chest. Another stretching exercise for your lower back and hips from Scott's Miracle Gro begins with lying on your back with feet on the floor. Cross your right ankle over your left knee and lift your left leg off of the floor, pulling the knee toward your chest. Gently shift your weight to the left while taking deep breaths. You can stretch your neck at the same time by rolling your head from side to side on the floor. Hold this stretch for 30 seconds, and then switch legs.

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Once you are in the garden, you can vary the intensity of your workout. As you work in the garden, remember to bend at the knees, not the waist. This rule applies to lifting, digging and raking. Don't hunch your back as you lean over, but keep it as straight as possible as you pull out weeds or plant seedlings. Be careful of twisting movements, even when you are kneeling or sitting.

Jeffrey Restuccio, gardening fitness expert, suggests standing, with knees bent, back straight in a crouch position, raking in a wide, sweeping motion. Exaggerate your motions. Keep them smooth and steady. Rake or hoe in wide, sweeping motions. Maintain a steady breathing rate as you rake, dig or hoe. For optimal aerobic benefits, strive to elevate your heart rate to 80% of maximum.

Estimated calories burned in 30 minutes for some gardening activities are:

- Digging – 202
- Raking – 162
- General gardening – 202
- Weeding - 182

Remember to breathe as you exercise, and enjoy the beauty of nature around you. That's something you won't find at the gym. While you cool down after your workout, stop to pick some of your fresh produce for an even greater reward.

Gardening can help boost your mood and your health. Gardening is also a great way to [lose weight](#), so get out there