

10 Tips to Make Gardening Easier

By Lesley Fleming, HTR

- 1. Think about it**....what gardening activities give you pleasure- growing veggies, smelling fragrant flowers, pruning? What tasks are physically challenging...and do you really need to do all of them? Can you purchase compost, hire someone to trim the 10 ft hedge or forgo the 15 flats of geraniums for 5?
- 2. Get higher**....gardening at ground level is one of the most challenging aspects of gardening for many people. Options exist. Consider containers that can be placed at a comfortable height; window boxes, raised beds, hanging baskets, vertical walls of living plants.
- 3. Fool around with tools**....visit a store with garden tools and try them all! Handle the handles and find the one that has the most comfortable grip, diameter, and weight...for you. Same for pruners and loppers- look for composite materials, ratcheted, geared mechanisms and the Arthritis Society's Ease of Use commendations. Keep your cutting tools sharp.
- 4. Reach out and touch**....this will determine your comfortable reach/extension. If you need to have a deeper bed than you can easily reach, plant low maintenance plants at the back, place stepping stones to access those deeper areas, and buy long handled telescoping rake/pruner/weeder to make your arms (and back) go the distance without strain.
- 5. Don't repeat yourself**....repetition of movement can cause strain on muscles and joints, taking the pleasure out of gardening. Consider breaking the task into smaller units over a period of days, practice using tools in either hand or better yet, use both hands.
- 6. Sit around**....both active and passive gardening can be fun; listen to the birds, use the bench you built, share lemonade with a friend in the shade of your tree. Take time to smell the roses.
- 7. To carry or drag**...that is the question. Dragging branches, leaves, or mulch on a tarp or using the newer garden carts -- lighter and smaller with 4 wheel stability -- can make moving garden materials less physically demanding than carrying the items.
- 8. Walk the walk**....for safety and accessibility. Especially for those with balance or mobility issues, keep paths and walkways level and clear of clutter. This includes toys, hoses, and deteriorating surfaces. Consider railings, seating platforms or garden beds closer to accessible paths. Bring the plants to you.
- 9. High maintenance**....who needs it. With so many plants to choose from nowadays, consider plants that are perennials, dwarf varieties, colorful but compact, sterile and unable to invade. Read labels and select plants based on their maximum heights, reducing the need to prune as often. Use one high maintenance plant as a focal point.
- 10. Green is good**....but can you reduce your lawn? Grass requires the most water, most effort, and probably the most chemicals in your yard. Making your lawn a bit smaller by enlarging beds, planting a tree or using permeable hardscapes will feel good and look good.

Lesley Fleming, registered horticultural therapist has worked with people of varying physical abilities, all of whom want to enjoy a garden. She created the adaptive tool display at Naples Botanical Garden, Florida in the Buehler Family Foundation Enabling Garden.