



ADAPTED GARDENING ACTIVITIES



GARDENING TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH NECK/BACK PAIN

This information booklet is based on our experience of working with patients in Horticultural Therapy sessions who have difficulty with neck and/or back pain.

It includes information on how different gardening activities may be beneficial therapeutically and practical advice on how to make gardening tasks easier.



Therapeutic
Benefits of
Seasonal
Horticultural Tasks

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Gardening for upper limb booklet.

Therapeutic gardening activities

Being active, exercising regularly and getting used to different loads and weights can be good for spines and may help prevent further episodes of back pain so gardening can be a really helpful activity to support with this. The movement generated by some gardening activities can also be a moderate intensity cardiovascular work-out. There is growing evidence that simply being in nature can be beneficial to our mental health and well-being which, in turn, may have a positive effect on managing pain. So, there are numerous reasons why gardening can be good for you.



10 things you need to know about your back.

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy
csp.org.uk.



Digging

Type of soil can influence how much effort may be required to break up the soil so a heavy clay may be more challenging than a light, sandy soil. Also, height of working space may affect the level of difficulty and emphasis of the activity on upper or lower body E.g., working at ground level or in a raised bed. The benefit of a raised bed is that you can choose what compost you fill it with, so it doesn't rely on the soil type in your own garden. Consider no dig beds and mulching areas to reduce the need for weeding, digging, and watering.



What kind of plot?
The no dig plot.
RHS Gardening



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Hoeing/Raking

This is a lighter task than digging but the action required is a repetitive push and pull motion. Hoeing is easier to do in dry weather and is suitable for annual weeds which can be left on the soil surface to die back, saving having to bend to lift them. A perennial weed with a deeper root will still require digging out. Having the right tool for the job used correctly will help. Some hoes can also be used for other tasks such as making and covering drills for seed sowing. Raking can be done to level soil (gravel rake), remove thatch from lawns, collect leaves and cut grass (spring rake).



Spring rake



Gravel rake



Short rake



Dutch hoe



Draw hoe

Turning Compost

Consider the type of compost bin you use which can affect ease of access and ability to turn the compost. We now have three open, wooden compost pens, made from pallets, which regularly require turning to ensure everything is mixed in together and the air circulates to generate good compost. This means regular forking or shovelling compost from one pen to another. If you have space these can be easier to access. Alternatively, you may find it easier to use a compost bin which is free standing and turns by a handle.



13 of the Best
Compost Bins.
BBC Gardeners'
World Magazine



Lawn maintenance/Cutting grass

The size and shape of your lawn will affect how long you will need to spend cutting grass. Keeping a slightly longer cut will reduce the frequency of mowing the lawn and consider grass varieties that are hard wearing and slow growing. Using a permanent edging strip to reduce the need for edging the lawn. The type of lawn mower used is also an important consideration see adaptive tools for further details.

Watering

If lifting a full watering can is uncomfortable. Part-fill a watering can and use both hands to hold it. Alternatively use a hose on a reel or an automated watering system.

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Garden Layout

Raised beds

Consider creating raised beds rather than having all beds/borders at ground level. This will enable you to vary the positions you work in and provides the option of sitting to complete some gardening activities. Be mindful of the width of raised beds the idea is to easily reach the middle of the bed from both sides.



Raised beds, high or low height garden beds to help disabled gardeners, gardening with a disability.
carryongardening.org.uk



Incorporate seating into the garden

Whether it's just having a chair, stool, or bench to sit on nearby or having raised beds which incorporate seating into them or are a good height to perch on the edge. It may not be necessary to do the whole activity in sitting but this provides an opportunity to take regular breaks.

Low maintenance growing

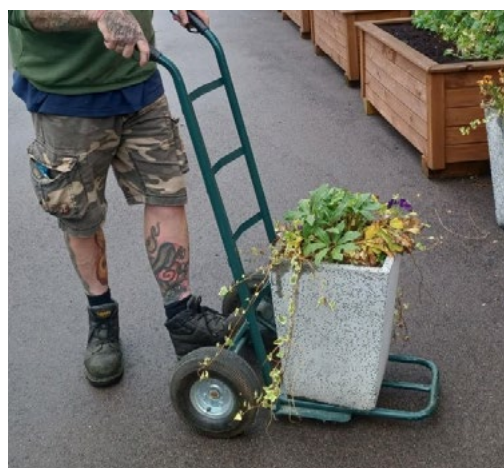
Consider the maintenance required with your planting scheme. For example, consider slow growing shrubs which are easier to maintain than annuals and herbaceous perennials. Use ground cover plants to help suppress weeds. Think about dwarf varieties of fruit trees which are easier to reach to prune and harvest. Replace grass with hard landscaping materials, such as reclaimed bricks, paving slabs, gravel, or slate which can still look attractive and be a feature.

Adaptive techniques

Use a **holster tool belt** for frequently used hand tools to reduce the need for repeated bending to pick up tools.

Buy **smaller quantities** of frequently used items such as compost to reduce the load to lift if this feels more comfortable.

Use **equipment to transport items** for example sack trolleys, wheelbarrows, and pot trolleys.



Pace activities

To avoid flare-ups of pain or fatiguing too quickly intersperse repetitive tasks with short rest breaks or ensure that you take a steadier pace to avoid boom and bust. Use the time to take in and appreciate your surroundings.

Balance activities

Be aware of the impact of the whole day so don't plan highly strenuous (mentally or physically) activity either side of a physical garden session. Or if you do adapt the garden slot to something less physical. Balance activities through the week as well as looking at the individual session.

Complete tasks in stages

If you are digging an area do a bit at a time rather than trying to do it all in one go.

Vary activities

Change and do a different activity which is using your body in a different way. You can resume the original activity later this may help to manage pain and fatigue.



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Find body positions which are comfortable

Aim for relaxed movement and progressively building up activity levels over time. If you experience discomfort which becomes unmanageable consider changing your technique. For example, how close to your body you hold the tool, the speed at which you work, whether a different tool can be used. This may help to prevent a flare up of pain when you re-visit the task.

Support

Are there people who can help with tasks you find more difficult? This could be a way of integrating family and friends into nurturing your garden and conserve your energy for other tasks on which you may want to focus.



Adaptive tools

Consider tools which are: lightweight, long handled or shortened, adjustable, powered or assist movement.

Try different tools before buying

Lots of companies have a wide range of choices so think about what best suits your needs. E.g., Garden forks and spades can vary in size and weight, handle lengths may differ so see what you find easier to use.

Make sure pruning tools like loppers and shears are sharpened so less effort is required to use them.

When using a lawnmower check whether the handle is adjustable, consider the weight and how easy it is to move.

Wheelbarrows which are lightweight and have two wheels can help to spread the weight of the load and be more stable to use.



Think about alternative tools for the same job

E.g., if you have a small area of lawn to cut would it be easier to use a strimmer rather than a lawn mower, try a tumbling compost bin reducing the need for physically turning compost.



Best lawn mowers to buy in 2021 – BBC Gardeners' World Magazine.
[gardenersworld.com](https://www.gardenersworld.com)

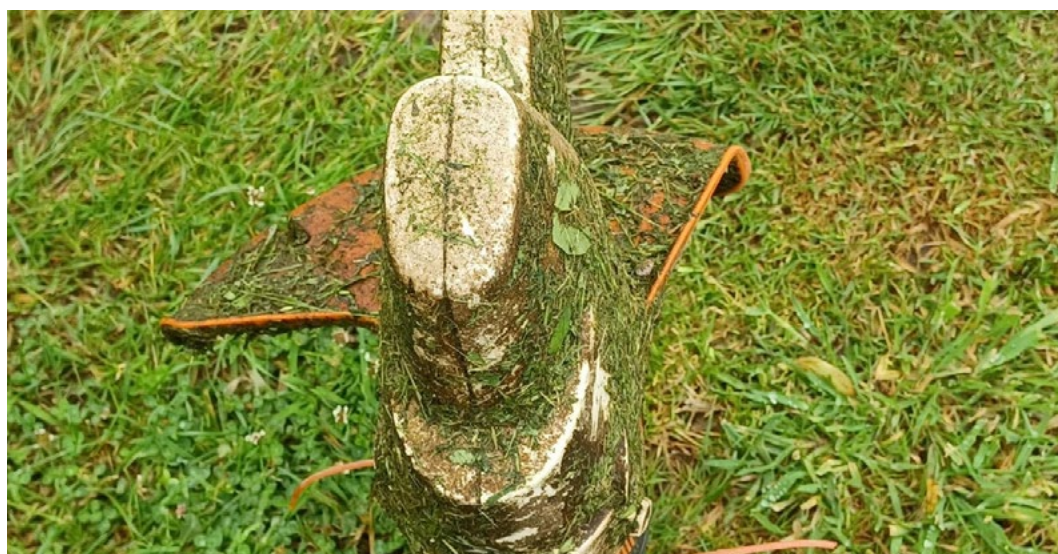
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Gardening Tools
for disabled
people.
Thrive



Ergonomically
designed garden
tools.
Wolf-Garten
Tools



The cutting
edge of
gardening.
Darlac Ltd.

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