



ADAPTED GARDENING ACTIVITIES



GARDENING TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH A LOWER LIMB INJURY

This information booklet looks at ways of using gardening activities therapeutically if you have a lower limb impairment. It is based on our experience of working with patients in Horticultural Therapy sessions who have difficulty with:

Lower limb pain or altered sensation, standing tolerance, balance, range of movement, or who may need to use walking aids.

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

See link to Gardening for Upper Limb booklet for examples of activities which can be done in sitting, standing or alternating between the two and so would be suitable for lower limb impairment.

All the below activities can help to build lower limb strength, standing tolerance and develop balance. The movement generated by some of these activities can be a moderate intensity cardiovascular work-out.

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.

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 to provide a stable base if working in standing and a firm platform as you balance and shift weight. However, if working from a seated position you may find it easier to use a compost bin which is free standing and turns by a handle removing the need to be turned by hand.



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

Hoeing/Raking

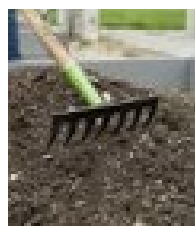
This is a lighter task than digging but the action required is a repetitive push and pull motion. Hoeing is easier to do in dry weather and is suitable for annual weeds which can be left on the soil surface to die back, saving having to bend to lift them. A perennial weed with a deeper root will still 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).



Four Ways To Hoe.
BBC Gardeners' World Magazine



Spring rake



Gravel rake



Short rake



Dutch hoe



Draw hoe



Lawn maintenance.
Thrive

Lawn maintenance

Aerating, scarifying, fertilizing, cutting grass, lawn edging, and watering are all tasks involved in maintaining a lawn so there are a range of activities which go into making your lawn look good but there are also ways to make this easier (see below).

Cutting grass can be a good way to practice mobility and balance by using the lawn mower as a support to aid balance and work bilaterally. This will be dependent on the type of lawn mower used, an important consideration depending on your space, budget, and ability. Thrive have a useful website for advice on choice of tools to make these tasks easier. Follow the links on the left for more information.



Mowing the lawn for disabled people, mowing the grass for disabled gardeners, mowing & lawn tools.
Thrive



Adaptive techniques

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 not using your lower limb in the same way. You can resume the original activity later this may help to manage pain and fatigue.

Find body positions which are comfortable

Consider even distribution of weight when standing. Think about the position of tools you are using in relation to your body and adjust for increased comfort. Periodically changing direction when hoeing or raking, for example, may also help to adjust body position.



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

GARDENING TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH A LOWER LIMB INJURY



Equipment and tools to help you.
Thrive

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 tasks you can manage more easily.



Ergonomically designed garden tools.
Wolf Garten Tools

No dig/mulching

Consider no dig beds and mulching areas to reduce the need for weeding digging and watering.

Raised beds

Consider creating beds at varying heights rather than having all beds/borders at ground level. This will enable easier access and the option of sitting to complete some gardening activities. Be mindful of the width of raised beds too to prevent overreaching, the idea is to easily reach the middle of the bed from both sides.



The cutting edge of gardening.
Darlac Ltd.

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

Manage your expectations of what you can grow and consider ways of making your garden lower maintenance. For example, 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 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.

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.

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