

# Accessible Gardening: Gardening with Arthritis

If you have joint pain, you are not alone. Over 27 million Americans have arthritis. Arthritis is a term used to describe more than 100 conditions of the joints. Osteoarthritis is the most common form. It is caused by the gradual breakdown of joint cartilage that cushions the bones. Cartilage is found in the knees, hips, hands and spine.

If you have arthritis, you may feel pain, stiffness, swelling, and heat in your joints. Arthritis can reduce strength and mobility. It can make it hard to do the things you do throughout the day: work, daily living activities like chores and caring for yourself, and hobbies. Arthritis pain can get worse if you have stress, fatigue, anxiety, depression, and if you focus on the pain. Resting, diet, education, care, and exercise are ways to manage arthritis.

Whether you are a veteran gardener or just beginning, gardening is a great exercise for managing arthritis. It helps keep joints flexible; maintain range of motion; and keeps your joints moving. This helps prevent muscles from weakening and becoming stiff. It is a great activity that you can start and stop when you want; can be within feet of your house; and you can do as much or as little as you want.



 **GreenThumbs**  
Healthy Joints



## Tips for Gardening with Arthritis

- Wear gardening gloves to protect joints from cold temperatures. Gloves also help cushion joints.
- Buy gloves that are one or two sizes too large for you and put foam padding inside. This can help ease joint pain.
- Digging in the dirt with your hands offers relief for pain and soreness in your hands and wrists. The temperature of the soil warms the joints in your hands. This lets more blood to flow through; lessening pain and soreness.
- Break up your gardening chores into smaller jobs you can do throughout the day or over several days.
- Try doing gentle stretching before you start to garden. This helps loosen joints and prevent injury. Try this simple stretch. With your arms straight out in front of you, reach forward as far as you can.



- Use long-handled tools so you can stand instead of stooping while gardening. Easy-to-grip hand tools and large handles make using tools a lot more comfortable.
- Use your larger joints to do the work. Instead of using your fingers to lift an object, try using the palm of your hand, forearms, or elbows.
- Instead of a traditional flowerbed, try gardening in containers or raised flower beds. This reduces stooping, kneeling and squatting.
- Take frequent breaks. Change position and tasks often. This helps you get more done before tiredness sets in.

## Resources

Learn more about arthritis; how to manage it; and gardening with arthritis. You may find these resources helpful:

- Call the Arthritis Foundation at **800-383-6843** or visit **www.arthritis.org**.
- Find tips for taking charge of your arthritis at the American Arthritis Society. Call **877-294-7062** or visit **www.americanarthritis.org**.
- Visit **www.arthritistoday.org** for tips on how to make gardening chores easier.

*All printed materials are available in braille, electronic format, CD and large print.*

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