KPOV - *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“15 Ways to Make Gardening Easier”

“Adaptive gardening” refers to ways to make tasks easier, thus enabling us to engage in the garden work we love despite physical challenges. An 83-year-old Corvallis, Oregon, Master Gardener offers 15 strategies and tools he uses to stay active in his garden.

First, you’ve got to respect your own physical abilities. **Warming up** with some good stretches tops the list. Gardening can strain muscles you don’t use every day. **Temper your daily goals**! In other words, start small so you don’t overdo it. Be sure to **take breaks**. Short breathers while you sharpen or disinfect a tool or simply admire what you’ve accomplished can help maintain your stamina.

Using the right tools is invaluable. Take advantage of today’s focus on **ergonomics.** Tools now come in a variety of weights and sizes. Some offer built-in braces to protect our wrists. Others have curved handles and indentations for fingers. Look for those that have padded handles. If necessary, modify your current tools with water pipe insulation, bicycle handles or golf club tape. **Keeping pruners and knives sharp** ensures they’ll cut with less effort. **Sit on a bucket** or garden seat or better, invest in a **kneeler with handles**. All will protect your back and knees -- and the kneeler handles enable you to push yourself up with surprising grace! Simplify care of hanging baskets by **installing a pulley system** to raise and lower your pots. You’ll avoid having to use a ladder or hoist up heavy watering cans. Speaking of watering, **match your watering can size to your abilities.** Protect your back and shoulders by ditching your three-gallon can for a smaller size.

There are several ways you can adapt your gardening techniques to extend the joy of working outdoors. First, **take advantage of raised beds**. You can make them yourself out of wood, concrete blocks or thick pavers or purchase kits at various retailers. Be sure to make them only three- to four-feet wide so you can easily reach into the middle. Heights for raised beds can be modified to accommodate gardeners in wheelchairs. **Vertical gardening** is another interesting option that’s typically easier on one’s back. Trellises are great for vining flowers or vegetable plants, while free-standing vertical structures or those attached to walls can hold individual pots of varying sizes.

Consider **gardening in containers** which can be placed on the ground or on tables and are easier to weed and fill with soil or amendments than in-ground beds are. Another technique is **“succession” gardening** in which you plant vegetables at staggered dates. It keeps you from being overwhelmed by the task of getting your entire garden planted, and plants will ripen at different times, again breaking up your garden chores. Another approach is to experiment with “**square-foot gardening**.” You plant vegetables in blocks according to their space requirements, so instead of having a six-foot row to thin and weed, you have, say, 16 carrots in an easy-to-maintain square.

Finally, there are various changes you might make to your landscape design. You can save time and steps if can **relocate your** **garden and tool storage** closer to the house. **Widening garden paths** makes them easier to navigate, especially if you use a wheelchair or scooter or might need to someday.

These are just a few examples of what we can do to continue to benefit from the rewards and joys inherent in gardening. For more information on this or any other gardening topic, call the Master Gardeners at 541-548-6088 or go to our website [www.gocomga.com](http://www.gocomga.com) and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV, The Point.

**Resources:**

[**https://extension.oregonstate.edu/news/15-ways-make-gardening-easier**](https://extension.oregonstate.edu/news/15-ways-make-gardening-easier)