

Everything I Know About Gardening I Learned in the Gym

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The title probably makes it obvious that I'm not an expert gardener! But, I do know about physical activity, and gardening is definitely that. Just like any other exercise in the gym or elsewhere, there are four basic rules to follow to keep your body pain free and running smoothly while you smooth out your flower beds:

- 1.) Warm up before you work out. Start off slow, use large body parts and large movements first, like taking your equipment from the garage to the garden. Do some easier physical tasks like de-potting plants before you start weeding, spading, or moving large bags of soil. When your body is properly warmed up you're less likely to pull a muscle, both in the garden and in the gym alike.
- 2.) Use good form. Just like in the gym, if you pay attention to your body positions while gardening, you'll get more of a workout and reduce your risk of injury. (For tips on good gardening form, see below.)
- 3.) Balance your movements. Often people use one side of the body more than the other when gardening. It's harder to do, but try to use both sides of the body equally, so both sides get the benefit of the physical work. Pull weeds with one hand and then the other, shovel on one side of the body then the other. Long term, if you spend a lot of time in the garden, this helps to avoid developing muscular imbalances.
- 4.) Take some time to stretch afterwards. When you use your muscles for the first time in a while, or use them in ways they're not accustomed, they're going to get sore afterwards. Stretching is a good way to reduce stiffness and soreness, and to stay mobile after a long day in the garden. Like any other physical activity, if you stretch immediately after a gardening stint, you'll get the most out of it because your muscles are still warm and much more flexible at the time.

If you're mindful of your body while you're minding your garden, you can get some good physical conditioning out of it, and feel good enough afterwards to relax and enjoy the fruits of your labor!

Notes on Form: Just like a gym workout, it's important to have good anatomical technique when gardening. Here are four important points:

- When lifting heavy objects, like bags of mulch or bricks, make sure you keep your back in neutral (a.k.a.: straight) and use your legs to lift most, or all, of the weight.
- When bending or twisting at the waist during weeding, planting and spading, pull your abdomen in and squeeze it tight. This is great work for your abs, will protect your back, and reduce the risk of back injury.
- When standing up from being on the ground, use a bent-knee position: plant one foot firmly on the ground and put your weight into your heel as you get up. Keep your knee behind your toes to prevent overstressing the knee, and to make the quadriceps, hamstrings, and gluteal muscles do the work.
- When holding out your arms for long periods of time while planting or weeding, be sure to keep from tightening your neck. You can avoid a stiff neck by actively pulling the shoulders away from the ears when using the arms and shoulders.

Luci is a Personal Trainer and trains all kinds of people including people who love gardening! She is also a fitness facility consultant and a fitness motivational speaker.

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