



Garden Smart: Tend to your garden, tend to yourself.



GUEST CORNER

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As the vibrant colors of Spring emerge, many eagerly anticipate the gardening season. Preparing for gardening involves more than just selecting plants and tools, it also requires a commitment to injury prevention.

UNDERSTANDING THE PHYSICAL DEMANDS OF GARDENING

Gardening requires a level of physical exertion that for the unwary might entail potential injuries. Common injuries sustained from gardening activities include the following:

- **Muscle strains and sprains:**

Moving soil, lifting planters, and bending to plant seeds can strain the back, shoulders and legs muscles if done improperly.

Use proper lifting techniques, stretch before gardening, and avoid overloading wheelbarrows or planters can help minimize muscle pulls.

- **Tendonitis:**

Repetitive motions, such as digging, raking, pruning, or weeding can cause inflammation in the tendons, commonly affecting the elbows (lateral and medial epicondylitis), wrists and shoulders. To prevent repetitive motions, incorporate rest breaks, use ergonomically designed tools, and vary gardening tasks which will help reduce the repetitive strain.

- **Knee and hip pain:**

Prolonged kneeling and squatting can lead to discomfort and pain in the knees and hips. Use knee pads or gardening stools, maintain proper posture, and engage in strengthening exercises for the legs may reduce your pain.

- **Back injuries:**

Twisting motions while lifting or improper posture during bending can stress the lower back. Use correct body mechanics by keeping your back straight while lifting, use your legs for support and do core stability exercises which will help reduce potential back injuries.

- **Balance and coordination:**

Navigating uneven surfaces and handling tools requires good balance, which can diminish as we age and increase the risk of falls.

PREPARATION TO PREVENT INJURIES

1. Prepare your body for a day in the garden by doing warm-ups and stretches:

- **Gentle warm-up:** Take 10-15 minutes to engage in light aerobic activity, such as fast-paced walking or marching in place, to increase blood flow to your muscles.

- **Targeted dynamic stretches** (see below) for your back, shoulders and legs that promote flexibility to reduce the risk of strains.

2. Use proper body mechanics when bending and kneeling, as well as getting back up from the ground:

- When bending down, keep your legs spread open slightly wider than hip width, hinge from the hips and push your buttocks backwards keeping your back straight. Bend your knees as if sitting back in a chair and avoid bending your knees forward over your toes.

- Use your stronger Glutes (buttock muscles) to assist getting up and down, which will help you be more balanced and offload on strains on the lower back and knees.

- Use your elbows/forearms resting on your thighs as you bend down to reduce the strain on your back.

- When getting up from the ground, go over on your hands and knees, spread your knees open, climb your body up from the down position by pushing your forearms on your thighs, then switch to your hands on your thighs until you get to the upright position.

3. Change positions frequently: alternate between kneeling, squatting, and standing to reduce strain on specific joints and muscles. Avoid crouching over in the same position for extended periods.

ADDITIONAL TIPS TO ENSURE A SAFE AND ENJOYABLE GARDENING SEASON

- Stay hydrated.
- Break tasks into manageable segments: divide larger projects into smaller tasks that can be completed over several days to prevent fatigue.

- Wear supportive shoes: proper footwear provides stability and support, reducing the risk of slips and falls.

- Take breaks often: schedule regular breaks to rest and stretch.

- Listen to your body: if you feel pain or discomfort, stop, and avoid pushing through pain, as this can lead to more severe injuries.

- Choose garden tools with longer handles that allow you to be in a more upright posture.

- Use a wheelbarrow or tarp to move objects and do not overload the wheelbarrow or tarp.

- Make use of a garden stool or a thick cushioned knee pad (or both) when tilling and planting.

- Use a large-handled container to carry your supplies to the garden. Carry the container with both hands in front of you, distributing the workload equally to decrease the stress in the upper body joints.

- Avoid carrying too heavy loads; instead, make several trips with lighter loads.

- If you have a strong dominant side, frequently switch to the non-dominant side for lifting, raking, or carrying to avoid repetitive overuse of one side.

POST-GARDENING BODY MAINTENANCE SUGGESTIONS

After gardening, repeat gentle stretches to cool down your body. If you overdid your fun gardening day and feel a body hurting, apply heat or ice over the muscle or joint for 15 minutes.

SUGGESTED DYNAMIC STRETCHES

To warm up and cool down for an enjoyable garden experience, perform the



following dynamic stretches (repeat each 10 times):

- Stand with your feet just wider than hip-width. Put your hands behind your neck. Tighten your core with knees slightly bent, twist your torso and upper body gently from side-to-side.

- Hold on to a sturdy object and swing your legs forward and backwards, then side to side.

- Walking stretch lunges: step forward in a deep lunge bending your front knee to stretch the back thigh and calf muscle, then lunge backwards with your front knee straight and foot flexed back towards you

until you feel a stretch behind your front knee (Hamstring).

Engage in regular exercise to build endurance, strength, flexibility, and balance. If you need any guided advice on exercises or experience any physical problems, please contact your physician or physical therapist to ensure a safe and enjoyable gardening experience that leaves you with beautiful results rather than aches and pains. With proper preparation, you can cultivate both your garden and your well-being. Happy gardening!

Lize Lubbe is the owner of Lize Lubbe Physical Therapy with its main practice located at 892 Route 35 in Cross River and a PT Studio in the premises of Apex Fitness (where her team focus on the rehabilitation of sports-related injuries). Learn more by calling 914-875-9430, emailing contact@lizelubbept.com or visiting www.lizelubbept.com.



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