



The Health Benefits of Gardening

If you want to stay fit, keep a firm grip on the health of your hands and benefit from fresh air, then gardening is the thing for you, according to research findings

Energetic gardening provides the same positive health benefits as jogging or swimming

Gardening for physical and mental health

A study carried out by scientists from Kansas State University, and published in horticultural journal *HortScience*, involved 53 older volunteers, 25 of whom were gardeners. The participants were assessed for general physical and mental health including hand strength and pinch force.

The more active gardeners among the volunteers showed the best levels of physical health and all the gardeners had stronger and more nimble hands, not to mention higher-than-average levels of self-esteem.

As good for you as jogging or swimming

Previous research by the same team found that regular energetic gardening provides the same positive health benefits as exercise programmes like jogging or swimming. Gardening chores including pushing a lawn mower, digging holes and pulling weeds use muscle groups all over the body and provide a good general work out.

Older adults were also less likely to give up compared with conventional exercise routines because they found gardening more interesting with different tasks to perform as the seasons changed.

Grow a garden for health

"There's a lot of natural motivation in gardening," said Candice Shoemaker, professor of horticulture forestry and recreation resources at Kansas State University. "For one thing, you know there's a plant you've got to go out and water and weed to keep alive. If we get the message out there that older adults can get health benefits from gardening, they'll realize that they don't have to walk around the mall to get exercise."

Health and wellness from gardening

Nicola Carruthers, former Chief Executive of Thrive — the national charity that uses gardening to change lives — would like to see more older people getting out into the garden.

"Using gardening to improve people's health is a wonderful way to enhance wellbeing, both physically and mentally," she says. "People of all ages and abilities can benefit from a sustained and active interest in gardening."

Colin Crosbie, curator at Wisley Garden agrees that gardening is the perfect way to stay healthy.

"The great thing about gardening is that it can be both energetic and relaxing at the same time," he says, "It is an all year round activity — even in the winter you can be raking the leaves, working in the greenhouse or doing some pruning. And there is nothing better than being able to stand back and admire the fruits of your labour."

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