

### **Take care of tools**

Paint the handles of all gardening tools a bright easy-to-see color. Wrap tape around small handles to make them easier to grip.

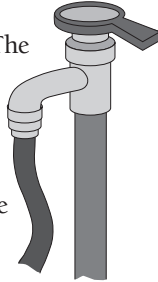


Keep cutting tools sharp for easier, safer use. You are less apt to cut yourself with a sharp tool than you are with a dull one.

Gardeners who use walkers could attach a bicycle basket to the front of the walker. This makes an excellent place to carry tools, cut flowers, or harvested vegetables.

### **Make watering easy**

A water source should be nearby. The hookup and faucet handle should be waist high and should have the type of handle that enables turning water on and off with minimal strength and pain. A hose caddy or reel and a lightweight hose make moving a hose easier.



### **Enlist a younger helper**

Gardening is therapeutic and a good way to bridge the generation gap. Share your gardening expertise and enthusiasm with children and teens by showing them the enjoyment and satisfaction you receive. Work on small projects that are easy and quick to complete.

Friends might appreciate the opportunity to help by doing part of your gardening. Many people who find their lives too full to plant and maintain a garden for themselves might find “a little gardening here and there” to be very enjoyable.

### **Share your experiences**

People of all ages like to garden and share their experiences and knowledge. Join garden clubs to visit with people who have similar interests.

### **For more information**

Check these additional publications in the Therapeutic Gardening Series:

- *A Factor in Choosing Healthcare Facilities*, RG 108
- *Benefits for Healthcare Facilities*, RG 109
- *Creating Raised Bed Planters*, RG 111
- *Resources*, RG 110

Check these Web sites:

ISU Extension Distribution Center  
Online Store—

[www.extension.iastate.edu/store](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/store)

ISU Horticulture—

[www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu](http://www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu)

Reiman Gardens—

[www.reimangardens.iastate.edu](http://www.reimangardens.iastate.edu)

The Iowa Horticulturist—

[www.iowahort.org](http://www.iowahort.org)

Iowa Master Gardeners

[www.mastergardener.iastate.edu](http://www.mastergardener.iastate.edu)

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... and justice for all

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**REIMAN  
GARDENS**  
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

**Therapeutic  
Gardening**

# Gardening Tips for Older Adults



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**A**ging may make some gardening activities more difficult but growing older certainly doesn't mean giving up gardening. Many simple ideas and inexpensive tools are available to help people continue their gardening hobby. Using caution and common sense when gardening is good advice for gardeners of any age.

### **Benefits of gardening**

Gardening gives you the opportunity to exercise both your mind and your body. Exercise can help reduce the risk of mental decline and Alzheimer's disease, boost fitness levels, and keep bones healthy. You can reap almost the same health benefits from gardening as you would from a workout in the gym. Meeting with other gardeners offers opportunities for stimulating conversation. In some studies, looking at a garden reduced stress, sped recovery from surgery, and lowered pain levels.

### **Visit with your doctor**

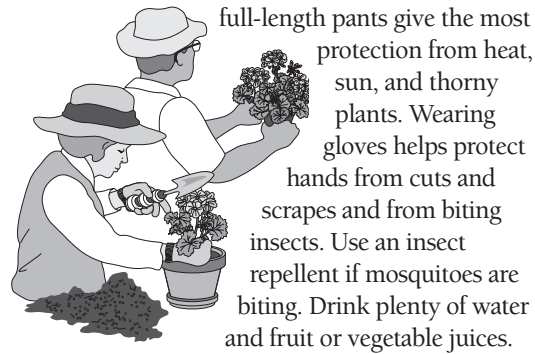
Describe your gardening plans and activities and ask if they are prudent for you. Discuss whether your garden projects need to be redesigned to match your capabilities. Keep it simple and don't overdo it.

### **Warm up first**

To avoid gardening aches and pains, start by warming up with a quick walk around the garden. Your doctor also might recommend some warm-up exercises, such as rising up and down on your toes followed by some gentle stretches or squats.

### **Be sun smart**

Some medications make you more sensitive to sunlight. Stay out of the midday heat and apply sunscreen to exposed skin. Garden early in the morning or in the evening when it's cooler. Wear a wide-brimmed hat and thin white or light-colored cotton clothing. Long-sleeved shirts and



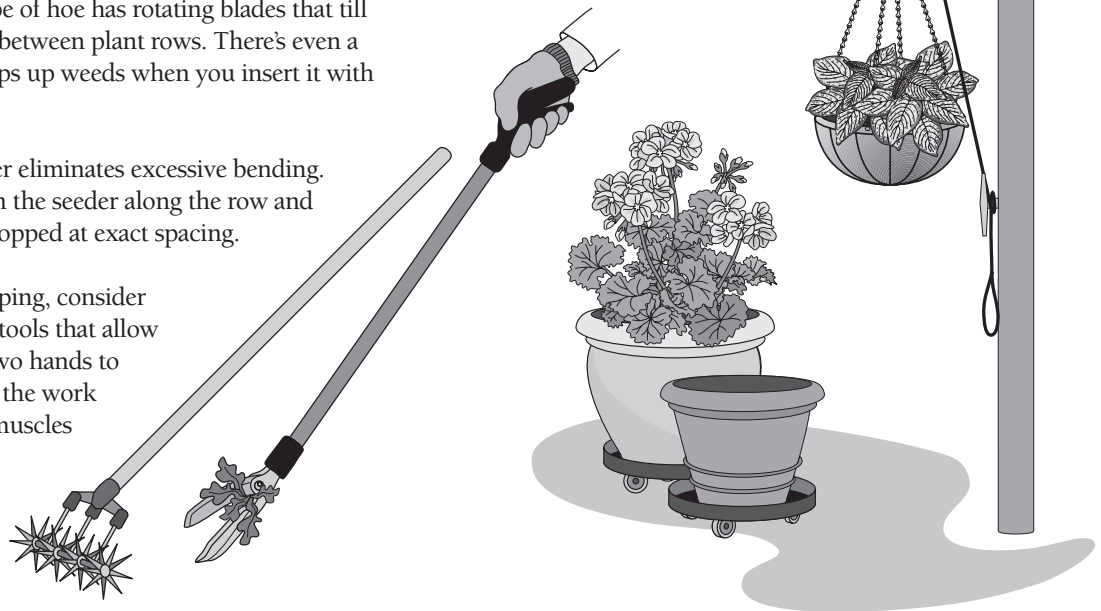
### **Use appropriate equipment**

Wagons, large-grip tools, and kneeling benches help make gardening easier. Local garden centers, nurseries, and hardware stores offer a variety of laborsaving and specialized tools in lightweight materials. For example, a long-handled bulb planter is handy for planting small vegetable and flower plants because it allows the gardener to operate it from a standing position. Long-handled tools also can aid in weeding.

An oscillating or two-way action hoe has blades that cut weeds off just under the soil line on both the push stroke and the pull stroke. Another type of hoe has rotating blades that till the ground between plant rows. There's even a tool that pops up weeds when you insert it with your foot.

A row seeder eliminates excessive bending. Simply push the seeder along the row and seeds are dropped at exact spacing.

When shopping, consider looking for tools that allow the use of two hands to help spread the work over more muscles and joints.



### **Think about garden access**

Place your main gardens in an area of your property that is easy to access. Avoid steep slopes and any surface that tends to get slick when it rains or has loose uneven footing.

To reduce kneeling and bending, consider adding raised beds. They can be built at any desirable height, plus the edges can be designed wide enough to sit or kneel on comfortably. If you don't want to give up the kneeling method of weeding or planting, try wearing cushioned kneepads or using a kneeling cushion.

Container gardens offer accessibility and are easy to manage in a variety of locations. Choose containers that are 18 to 30 inches tall. For even more flexibility, check garden centers for wheeled platforms that simplify moving the plants around.

Pulley systems can be used to raise and lower hanging baskets for ease of maintenance.