



Gardening for the Physically Challenged



By Bob Labozetta (UC Master Gardener, Mariposa)

Gardening is a great physically activity that keeps one's mind, spirit, and body in healthy condition. Offering exercise, sunshine, food and ornamentals are optimal benefits of this outdoor exertion.

Age and physical limitations may seem to preclude this enjoyable avocation. However, careful planning, new techniques, and modified garden implements can make gardening a doable, rewarding endeavor.

Set your garden area up for success. Safe, secure, and well-drained walking surfaces with good traction are essential. Wide pathways and work areas accommodate wheelchairs and walkers and give you more space to move around.

Raised bed or container gardening eases the strain from bending and stooping. Raised beds can be built to a height of 28-30 inches on the ground or can be built with legs to sit at wheelchair or standing height. Be sure to allow easy access to the middle of the bed.

There are several techniques to ease the workload. Soaker hoses and drip irrigation systems can water for you and automated system make it worry free. Choose perennials over annuals to cut down on planting time year after

year and designate the latter for containers or window boxes. Cut down on weeding by mulching with a layer of newspapers or cardboard.

Many tools can help those with physical limitations in the garden. Extendable, adaptive, and more ergonomic tools are designed to provide mechanical advantage. Choose from specialty garden product makers like Fiskars, Corona, Gripworks, disABILITY Work Tools, Life With Ease and others. Garden aids such as a garden stool, rolling work seat, foam knee pads, and a portable wagon or bucket or a handyman's tote also make gardening more accessible.

Be sure to wear appropriate garden attire such as long sleeve cotton or SPF-labeled shirts, wide-brimmed hats, and gloves. Minimize midday gardening when it's hot, stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water, and use a damp towel around your neck and refrigerated cold packs for heat relief.

Sensory aids for gardeners help those who are starting to experience memory loss as they age. Paint them bright colors or tie brightly-colored ribbons or labels to them. Make sure your garden design is simple and has a distinctive and familiar focal point allowing for easier orientation. Incorporate plants that generate memories such as a favorite herb or vegetable.

In-depth resources for physically-challenged gardeners can be found on our website at http://cemariposa.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardener/. Remember, with appropriate adaptations, gardening is for everyone and every body!

UC Master Gardeners of Mariposa County are located at 5009 Fairgrounds Rd., Mariposa. For more gardening and event information, visit our website (http://cemariposa.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardener/) and Facebook page (UC Master Gardeners of Mariposa County). UC Master Gardeners staff a Helpline serving Mariposa County, including Greeley Hill, Coulterville, and Lake Don Pedro (209-966-7078 or mgmariposa@ucdavis.edu). Listen to us on the radio at KRYZ 98.5 FM on Wednesdays at 2 pm and Saturdays at 5 pm.