

Staying Fit through Gardening

By Ron Tanner - DIG it

Are you ready for a 'Betcha didn't know'? Here goes: Betcha didn't know that you can burn up to 300 hundred calories per hour by doing something that you really might enjoy. So you ask, what is that? Gardening in your own back yard is a proven fun and productive way to burn calories, stay fit, and live a better quality of life whether we are young, or as we age.

Gardening combines three important types of physical activities: strength, endurance and flexibility. Gardening may also have physical healing effects. You can get the most physical benefit by gardening the old fashioned way. For example, you might consider using manual trimmers, lawnmowers, an old fashioned rake, shovel, or broom to help tidy up the yard and garden instead of power mowers, blowers, trimmers and the like. Take a look at the enclosed chart from a study by *William D McArdle, Frank Katch, Victor L Katch, Exercise Physiology: Energy, Nutrition, and Human Performance (Lippincott Williams & Wilkins) (2001)*. From this chart you can get a pretty good idea of the calories you can burn by doing everyday gardening

Activity (30 minutes for 150 lb person)	Energy Expenditure (kcal)
Digging/pulling weeds, removing rocks	200-250 kcal
Trimming trees and shrubs	150-170 kcal
Mowing (using push reel mowers)	200-230 kcal
Raking	120-150 kcal
Swimming (slow to fast)	250-340 kcal
Walking (slow to fast)	150-230 kcal

tasks. It's best to get into a routine that allows you to garden twenty to thirty minutes at least three times a week rather than one long tiring and strenuous session. Get used to working at a steady pace of say, ten minutes, and then changing positions for the particular task that you are doing. That way you'll avoid overusing one group of muscles or tendons. If you are digging holes to plant bulbs, you might dig with your right hand first, then try digging with your left hand.

Don't overdo it though. You also can try alternating heavier and lighter gardening tasks. You might rake for a while, then dig holes, then sweep grass. Don't worry; the work will not go away. It will still be there for you on the next cycle. When you get in better shape, try double digging your garden bed before planting time. You'll get your work there.

Another good thing about exercise through gardening is that you have a better chance of sticking with it than you might with some other routine aerobics such as the daily "dreadmill". Of course, if you are like most gardeners, you'll probably at least walk to your garden on a daily basis just to check things out, do insect patrol, weed some, or water a little.

Preparation and technique is important. Always stretch first before you began your tasks. Practice deep breathing. Use some of the same techniques you have learned and practice at the gym. It's very important to hydrate well on hot days. Drink plenty of water before, during and after your tasks. Also, make sure to wear protective clothing and gear on hot and high intensity heat days. Protection should include UV protective sunglasses, long sleeves, insect repellent, if necessary, and a large floppy hat that shades your forehead, neck and the sides of

your face. Use proper technique when kneeling or getting up from the ground. Some of the garden stools are a wonderful aid as we age. Preferred work positions would be having one knee on the ground, working on hands and knees using a kneeling pad, or sitting on a chair or stool rather than squatting. Squatting for long periods of time can put unhealthy pressure on knee ligaments.

So get “growing” with your spring garden, but know that you are not only growing healthy, wholesome, and tasteful food, but you are also improving your health for now and years to come.