

Health Benefits of Gardening for Seniors

Gardening is a great hobby for people who like to stay active, get plenty of fresh air, and accomplish something useful in their free time. It also offers a surprising array of health benefits, all of which can have a significant impact on the quality-of-life seniors can enjoy during their retirement years. Here are some of the health benefits of gardening for seniors you may not know about:

Mental Benefits of Gardening

It may surprise you to learn that there are many mental health benefits of gardening. Gardening is excellent for both your psychological well-being and overall brain function, and it can even help to prevent specific cognitive and mental health disorders. Getting one's hands a little dirty can help seniors to:

- Relieve stress
- Increase production of dopamine and serotonin, which help to regulate mood and support overall happiness
- Decrease the risk of dementia by engaging the mind; gardening can even help seniors who do have dementia by stimulating the senses and keeping them in the present moment
- Alleviate and reduce the risk of depression
- Prevent boredom and gain a sense of accomplishment
- Encourage continued learning about various plants and their needs, which can also build skills, engage the mind, and boost self-esteem

Physical Benefits of Gardening

Gardening regularly provides moderate-to-intense exercise that builds strength in the arms, legs, and back as well as smaller stabilizing muscles. The best part? If you're focused on what you want to accomplish, you might not even notice that you're working out. Getting regular exercise is beneficial for seniors because it:

- Lowers blood pressure
- Reduces the risk of heart disease, stroke, obesity, and osteoporosis
- Improves the quality of sleep
- Increases dexterity and balance, both of which are helpful for preventing and recovering from falls
- Boosts strength and mobility in seniors, which helps them live independently for longer

In addition to all of these essential physical health benefits, gardening provides exposure to the sun, which helps the body produce Vitamin D. Adequate Vitamin D production helps to:

- Boost immune system function
- Increase calcium absorption for stronger bones
- Prevent fatigue and joint pain
- Reduce the risk of developing diabetes as well as certain cancers

A busy day in the garden can be a good form of exercise.

While tending a garden, you perform functional movement that mimics whole body exercise. You perform squats and lunges while weeding. Carrying bags of mulch and other supplies

works large muscle groups. Digging, raking and using a push mower can be physically intense activities. You may burn as many calories as a workout in the gym. If you aren't used to these types of activities, it is likely that you will feel a bit sore after a busy day gardening. Gardening also can improve your balance, strength and flexibility.

Gardening activities can be modified if movement is a challenge. There are different ways to participate if you think outside of the box. Use a small stool or raised garden beds if you suffer from back pain. A shovel or rake can be used to support your knees when squatting. Smaller pots are lighter and easier to move than large ones. Buy smaller bags of mulch or soil that are easier to carry.

For more gardening health benefits for seniors, visit: www.jcnh.org/health-benefits-of-gardening-for-seniors/.

