

Energy Express: Welcome to the garden of eatin' - can you dig it?

by Marilyn_Preston

Three cheers for the new organic vegetable garden on the White House South Lawn. Maybe four! Now the question is, will that delicious Garden of Eatin' seed others just like it, in window boxes, backyards and community plots all across the country?

Lettuce hope. There is nothing more satisfying than eating your own sweet, juicy tomato. It's a kind of miracle. Food you grow tastes better, costs less and has greater nutritional value, and it leaves a carbon footprint the size of a pea.

Growing some of your own food is also a splendid way to plant ideas in your child's brain about what a real food is, and how good it can taste. Next thing you know your 10-year-old is snacking on cauliflower chunks instead of corn chips, and goes to sleep at night dreaming of broccoli stalks the size of baseball bats. Well, not immediately, but over time, working in a garden can give your child a wondrous sense of what it is to be connected to nature. It's a good thing.

And finally, growing herbs, vegetables and/or flowers can be terrific calorie-burning, fat-melting physical exercise. All that bending, digging, lifting and carrying works your arms and legs, back and shoulders, in challenging ways that can make you stronger and more flexible – if you are mindful and aware. If instead, you rush into your garden chores carelessly, talking on the cell, your mind a million miles away, you can wrench your back, destroy your knees, create excruciating tension in your shoulders and wind up with a neck stiffer than a newborn zucchini.

So before you start growing a list of gardening aches and pains, consider the following:

Learn To Lift and Carry. Carry heavy items (bags of fertilizers, buckets of water, etc.) close to your body. Don't hold them out in front of you, arms outstretched. When you start to lift something, take a breath, and make sure your body is aligned and ready. Relax your head and neck, drop your shoulders, and when you lift, find and engage your core muscles (your abs, gluts, torso muscles on both sides of your spine, front and back.) Lift slowly, pushing down through your feet and up through your legs. No grabbing and snatching, and no undue pressure or strain on your lower back. It should be straight when you lift, not bent.

And finally, always use common sense. If you think it's too heavy to lift or carry by yourself, it probably is. Why be macho when you can be smart? Get help, or risk an injury.

Small Bites Avoid Big Problems. When you shovel or dig, be content to take small bites with good tools that fit your hand and your build. And just like in the gym, don't overdo it. Big shovels loaded with heavy dirt can

easily strain your back, shoulders and knees. To avoid post-planting strains and sprains, keep your mind focused on the task at hand: smaller loads, no sudden twisting or torquing, moving with awareness so you stay balanced and aligned.

A Little Protection Goes a Long Way.

â€” Start with your knees. Protect their delicate infrastructure by kneeling on foam, towels or kneepads.

â€” Protect your eyes with sunglasses and your favorite hat.

â€” Protect your skin from the burning sun with proper cover-up (clothes or creams) and by moderating exposure.

â€” Warm up before you get into the heavy-duty chores by doing simple range-of-motion stretches that juice up your joints and energize your muscles. If you feel pain when you garden, back off, relax, and find an easier way.

â€” Drink enough water to stay hydrated, and don't stay in any one gardening position too long.

Cultivate Calmness. To make all your gardening chores more effortless, move with the flow of your breath. In all your workouts, from the basketball court to the compost heap, bring your mind into play. Focusing on your breath will get you started, but then it's up to you to immerse yourself in the moment and not ponder the past or worry about the future. Let your time in the garden grow your understanding of how important it is to let go of anxiety on a daily basis.

Energy Express-O! Digging Deeper

"Everything that slows us down and forces patience, everything that sets us back into the slow circles of nature, is a help. Gardening is an instrument of grace." â€” May Sarton

Marilynn Preston â€” fitness expert, personal trainer and speaker on healthy lifestyle issues â€” is the creator of Energy Express, the longest-running syndicated fitness column in the country. She welcomes reader questions, which can be sent to MyEnergyExpress@aol.com.

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