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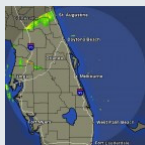
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HOME FIX -UP The great outdoors

Tips make gardening easy on arthritis

By using good tools and taking breaks, those with joint pain can enjoy planting and pruning.



The Garden Kneeler, available at [yardbutlerstore.com](#) for \$32. ([yardbutlerstore.com](#), [yardbutlerstore.com](#) / September 25, 2007)

Kenda Robertson | Special to the Sentinel
October 6, 2007

Gardening can be great fun and hard work, but it shouldn't wear us out.

As one of America's favorite pastimes, gardening offers a sure way to get exercise, fresh air and sunshine, while allowing us to nurture our plants and be closer to nature.

But for those who have green thumbs but also are plagued by arthritic joints, swollen fingers or wrists, backaches or just general stiffness, working in the garden can be a challenge.

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But don't let a few aches and pains stop you from doing what you love, advises Susan Cuellar, regional vice president of the Florida Chapter of the Arthritis Foundation. By taking the proper precautions to protect and prepare your body for your favorite outdoor hobby, she says you can reap all the benefits with less pain and discomfort.

"Moving is good for people with arthritis," says Cuellar. "And gardening gets you moving and helps relieve stress, which also reduces painful flare-ups."

Cuellar says the best way to prepare for a day of gardening is to plan your activities, garden during the time of day when you feel your best, and make sure you have everything you need before you head out.

"It's important to spend some time doing the things in your garden you enjoy and not just those that feel like work," Cuellar says. "You can achieve this by planning ahead and setting goals."

Here are other considerations before, during and after gardening:

Warm up before work. Do gentle arm, back, neck and leg stretches before you start tasks. Shake out hands, wrists and feet, or take a quick walk around the yard.

Choose the right tools. A number of companies offer a variety of "ergonomic" or "joint-friendly" products, designed to reduce wear and tear on our bodies.

For more than 50 years, Yard Butler, a division of Lewis Tools, has crafted specialty garden tools.

"As our population ages, more older Americans are gardening, and they want tools that

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Issue of From House to House, a lifestyle magazine from the

The Garden Kneeler, available at [yardbutlerstore.com](#) for \$32, offers two solutions in one. Or, the Garden Rocker, a low chair that offers a wide range of movement, is available at [gardeningwithease.com](#) for \$41.95.

Even out the load. Let your larger, stronger joints do the work when possible. Carry items close to your body and try to spread the load by using hands and arms or elbows, rather than just fingers.

Change jobs frequently. Alternate a strenuous activity with something easier in order to exercise different sets of muscles. Repetitive motions and staying in one position too long can cause muscle problems and aggravate arthritis.

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Take frequent breaks. The Arthritis Foundation recommends taking a 15-minute break every hour of work. Bring a kitchen timer to keep track. Enjoy a cold drink, smell the flowers, stretch, shake out hands and wrists, and plan your next task.

After putting away your tools for the day, be sure to gently stretch, rub and shake out those muscles and joints again. A warm, soothing bath also is a nice way to end a pleasant, productive day.

fast pace, plenty 3s

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help them get their work done with less effort," says Dan Wright, president of Lewis Tools. "Our products are designed to put less strain on joints and muscles and make gardening easier for everyone."

When choosing joint-friendly tools, look for these attributes:

Thick handles and soft grips to cushion repetitive pressure on hands. OXO's tools offer cushiony grips and can be found at [charleysgreenhouse.com](#) or local garden centers.

Long-handled tools that keep you from bending over too much. Products such as the Rocket Weeder, available at [yardbutlerstore.com](#) for \$26.37, allow you to weed while standing up.

Lightweight, but heavy-duty tools that won't break.

Lighten the load. Sitting down while gardening takes the weight off load-bearing joints and allows you to work longer without discomfort.

Use a low stool that allows you to reach the ground without putting strain on your knees or back. A cushioned kneeler or foam knee pads help soften the impact on knees.