



Gardening & Back Injuries

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A 5-Minute Safety Training Aid

Weekend gardening can be one of life's greatest pleasures. However, pulling weeds, raking a lawn or just digging a hole can strain the back in painful ways. Additional causes of lower back strain are the frequent squatting and kneeling required for planting, weeding, digging and raking, which involve repetitive motion as well as twisting and turning. Lifting bags of mulch, leaves or fertilizer may lead to back pain and ultimately a trip to the doctor's office and bed rest.



Here's what experts recommend to help reduce back pain for gardeners:

- Avoid squatting and bending as much as possible.
- Kneel on a soft cushion instead of bending over while weeding, planting or working close to the ground.
- Take stretch breaks every 15 to 30 minutes. Slowly stand up. Take several deep breaths and place your hands on your upper buttocks. Gently extend the back.
- Use a dolly or wheelbarrow instead of carrying bags of leaves, grass clippings or other yard debris to the curb for pickup.
- Never lift by simply bending over. Instead, make the leg muscles do most of the work. Grasp objects while squatting, then lift by raising the entire body, keeping the weight over the legs.
- Rake and dig only for brief periods of time. Take frequent rest breaks and alternate between left-side and right-side raking and digging.
- When loading a wheelbarrow, load material toward the front using the wheel as a pivot and use your legs to lift the wheelbarrow.

- Get assistance when lifting large bags of potting soil, mulch, fertilizer or large potted plants.
- When using a push mower, push with your legs and maintain good posture.
- Make sure you stay well hydrated by drinking plenty of fluids to replace what you have lost. This will help decrease fatigue and the chance of injury.

By following these simple, common-sense recommendations, gardening can once more become one of life's greatest pleasures.

