



For those who don't run marathons and who prefer more subtle physical activity, gardening can give you the workout you're looking for. The result: fragrant blooms that delight, fresh food and enough physical activity to qualify as excellent exercise.

# Cultivating wellness

**Gardening burns calories, tones muscles and revives the soul.** By Ann Schultz

*Who loves a garden still his Eden keeps  
Perennial pleasures plants, and wholesome  
harvests reaps*

— Amos Bronson Alcott

**T**hink gardening is just for your grandmother? Think again. Americans of all ages are digging in and discovering the glories of gardening. Spending time among the plants and flowers now ranks as one of the top ways we spend our leisure time. And studies have shown that gardening is great for the body and the soul.

## Digging up the health benefits

"Gardening is one of those rare activities that many people enjoy so much they

don't even think of it as exercise," says Bryant Stamford, an exercise physiologist who directs the Health Promotional and Wellness Center at the University of Louisville. But there's no denying that gardening is good for your health. Thirty minutes of moderate gardening – weeding, deadheading and feeding plants and flowers – may decrease the risk of numerous chronic ailments including heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes. Activities such as raking, digging and planting compare with brisk walking and volleyball as workouts while chopping, shoveling and tilling give you the same workout benefits as softball, downhill skiing and doubles tennis.

Gardening requires lots of movement – bending, twisting and lifting. It all leads to healthier bones, muscles, and joints, while

increasing flexibility and body strength. Gardening targets muscles in the legs, arms, back and shoulders. Additionally, fresh air is good for your lungs and skin.

Time in the garden can also substantially reduce stress and give you a psychological boost. Gardening as a prevention and cure for illness dates back to Egyptian physicians who prescribed horticulture and long walks in the garden for their patients. Hours fly by and troubles disappear as you plant, water and literally stop and smell the roses. Studies at Texas A & M University have confirmed that simply looking at a plant can reduce stress and lower blood pressure and muscle tension.

## Condo gardening

You don't have to have a big backyard to garden. You can garden in a townhouse or condo by planting flowers, trees and

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## Trimming calories

Here's an estimate of how many calories you will burn in an hour doing various gardening exercises:

- Trimming shrubs – **284**
- Raking – **324**
- Planting – **364**
- Weeding – **364**
- General gardening – **404**



## OC gardens & nurseries

### Sherman Gardens

2647 East Pacific Coast Highway, Corona del Mar, 949.673.2261

Located on Pacific Coast Highway, just down the Road from Fashion Island, is Sherman Gardens. This 2.2 acre horticultural retreat includes gardens, patios and conservatories flanked by tiled fountains. Knowledgeable docents offer tours. Le Jardin, the Garden's restaurant, offers a delicious menu in a greenhouse setting.

### Rogers Gardens

2301 San Joaquin Hills Road, Corona del Mar, 800.647.2356, rogersgardens.com

Rogers Gardens is known as one of America's most beautiful home and garden centers. A variety of annuals, perennials and landscape plants are displayed throughout the garden's seven acres. In the fall, staff creates a haunted house, while in winter, candles light an evening holiday walk. Free gardening seminars are offered throughout the year.

### Plant Depot

33413 San Juan Creek Road, San Juan Capistrano, 949.240.2107, plantdepot.com

Farther south in San Juan Capistrano you'll find Plant Depot. A family-owned business, the nursery offers a wide selection of flowers, plants, shrubs, trees, and pottery and garden accessories. At the center of the nursery is a pond in which colorful koi swim beneath water lilies and cascading water falls.

### Fusano's

1370 South Coast Highway, Laguna Beach, 949.497.4880, fusanoslagunabeach.com

Founded by Cristin Fusano, a noted local horticulturalist, landscape designer and lecturer, this nursery is a treat for the senses. Several levels of Fusano's offer views of the ocean while nursery sections are arranged artfully by color in an unforgettable palette. **OCM**



**Time spent gardening is also good for the soul. Whether you revel in the quiet time alone, or prefer to garden with your child or mate, the experience is much more than physical.**

shrubs in containers. The possibilities are endless. Many seasonal or perennial flowers and plants do well in pots. Dwarf citrus trees and fruit trees that yield fragrant blossoms and tasty fruit can be planted in containers. Want a vegetable garden but don't have a backyard? Try planting veggies in a container at different levels. Use trellises and poles to train climbers like cucumbers and beans. Put lush stalks of tomatoes in the center. Group low growers like lettuce and carrots around the base. Then add herbs like chives, basil and oregano. There is nothing more delicious than recipes made from fresh herbs, fruits and vegetables harvested from your own garden. Even strawberries can be grown in a special terracotta pot called a strawberry pot that has tiered pockets for soil and plants. The plants then trail at different levels bearing lacy flowers that become juicy berries.

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### Children love it

When I was a new step-mother, I was looking for ways to bond with my step-daughters, then 9 and 11.

One Saturday afternoon we were browsing in the nursery. The girls discovered a display of spring bulbs. We decided to have a gardening contest. It was so much fun picking out the various bulbs we wanted to plant. Later that weekend, I taught them how to dig the holes and plant the bulbs in their special section of the garden. Watching their amazement as the first green shoots appeared and then blossomed into beautiful flowers was like discovering the joys of gardening all

over again. I found my relationship with the girls was better for the experience.

"Children are fascinated by the way things grow," says Peter Ferretti, a professor of horticulture. Gardening with the children in your life is a wonderful hands-on way to teach them to enjoy and respect



nature. Planting seeds, watching them sprout and mature, and then harvesting the tomatoes, corn, lettuce or cucumbers is a particularly effective illustration of the circle of life. Let your children choose seeds from a catalog or seedlings from the nursery. Select a space in the yard for a small garden or assign particular plants and flowers to their care. Gardening gets your kids away from sedentary activities such as the computer, television and phone, and out into the fresh air. As they hoe, rake and weed, they are improving fine and gross motor skills. Giving your child the task of watering, feeding and weeding a small garden also teaches responsibility, and builds self esteem.

## Fresh food, too

On top of the physical and psychological benefits, gardening supplies you with home-grown fruits and vegetables, too. You'll cook like a Food Network Chef using the harvest from your garden. Whip up tangy vinaigrette and drizzle it over shrimp and nutritious tomatoes and salad greens. Or, how about pasta tossed with a pesto made from just picked, fresh leaves of basil? Add chives from your own herb garden to twice-baked potatoes or marinade for a London Broil or Flank Steak. And don't forget the best part of the meal – dessert. Try fresh baked brownies topped with vanilla ice cream and berries picked from your patio strawberry pot.

## Safety tips

Just like most sports and activities, gardening can be hazardous to your health if done incorrectly. So follow

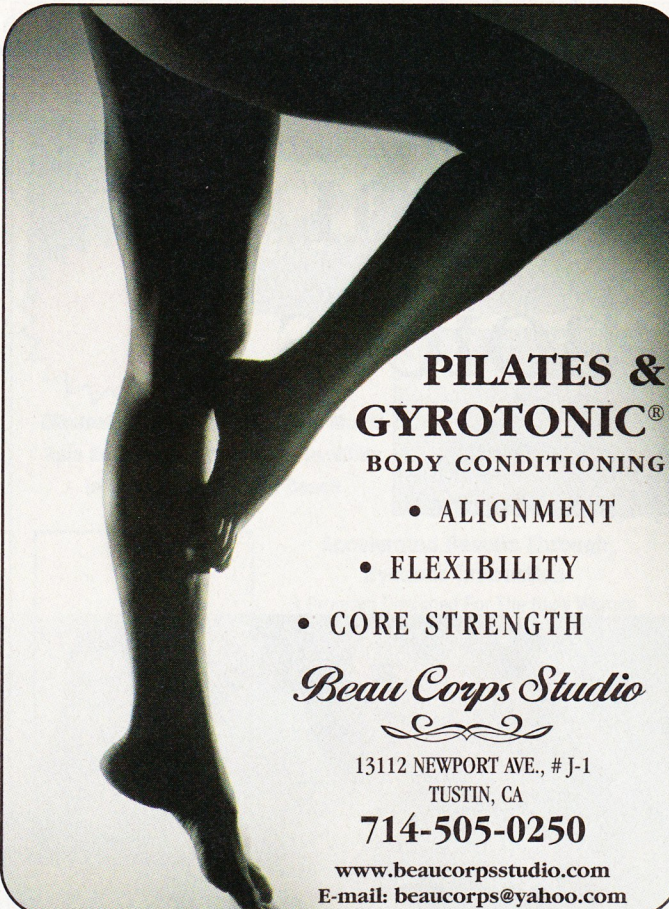
these safety tips. Take a few minutes to stretch before you begin. Don't bend from the back as this can lead to back strain and sore muscles. Instead, bend from the knees and use your legs, shoulders and arms in a rocking motion. Break your sessions into two to three hour periods rather than six to 10-hour marathons. Warm up, cool down and don't overexert yourself. Try to garden in the morning or late afternoon, rather than in the heat of the day. Drink plenty of water.

Remember to protect your skin. Even on an overcast day you can get sunburned, so never forget your wide-brimmed hat and sunscreen. It's best to wear long sleeves and long pants not only to protect your skin but also to protect from insect bites. Don heavy gloves, especially when working around thorny plants such as roses, bougainvillea and berries.

Whenever possible use organic and natural remedies to eradicate garden pests. This is especially important if you have kids and pets. Be careful with your plant selection if you have little ones – whether two- or four-footed – in the garden. Some of the loveliest and most fragrant plants and flowers are poisonous. Avoid flowers like Sweet Peas, Foxglove, Oleander and Wisteria or plant them out of the way of little fingers. Thoroughly rinse any veggies harvested from your garden for kitchen use.

With the arrival of warm weather and long summer days, why not spend some time in the garden? You'll reap wonderful health benefits from time with Mother Nature. **OCM**

*Ann Schultz is an OC writer.*



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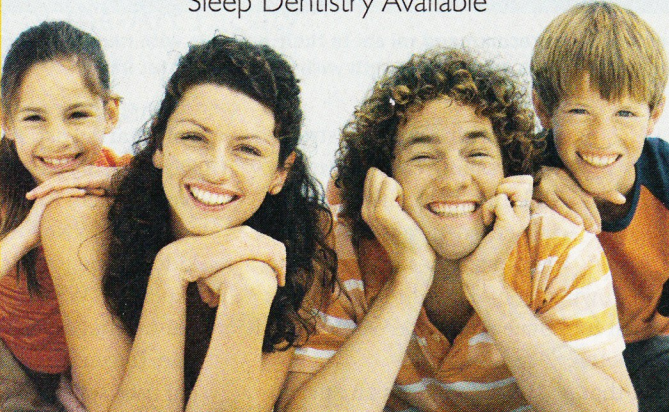
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