

STAYING INJURY FREE IN THE GARDEN & YARD

Yay – spring may be finally here! And with it, our enthusiasm for working in the garden. Unfortunately, we often overdo it those first few days or use our body in a poor way and end up with an early season injury. This post will cover some tips for avoiding injury, aches and pains as we return to the garden; and hopefully help keep you happily gardening throughout the year.

First, just like with any sport, return to gardening gradually and build up your endurance. It is important to take breaks and use your break time to follow the general rule of “do the opposite of what you have been doing”.

For example, if you have been spending time bent over weeding or pruning, stand and do periodic backward bend (figure 1) or you can do them lying down: (figure 2).



If you have been on your feet mowing, fertilizing, standing and pruning, lie down for a few minutes and take the weight off your spine, pull your knees to your chest or stretch your hips.



BODY MECHANICS BASICS FOR GARDENING:

While we are in the garden, proper use of our body can help to prevent overstressing joints and muscles.

1. Always face the activity that you are involved in. Your hips should face what you are working on while you are weeding, pruning, or using the chainsaw. Don't twist your body to reach what you are working on.
2. Be as close as you can to what you are working with.
3. When bending or squatting use a flat back or neutral spine as much as possible. Bend at your hips, knees and ankles, but keep your spine straight.
4. Use your strong legs as your power source when raking, shoveling, mowing or lifting. Shift your weight from leg to leg almost like lunging rather than reaching and pulling with your upper body and shoulders.
5. Don't forget to use proper tools and proper protection including gloves, eyewear, sunhat and sunscreen, and if needed, protection on your legs. There are many great ergonomic shears, weeding tools and other gardening utensils available these days to help protect your hands, wrists and joints.
6. Practice using your body correctly until it becomes second nature. It takes practice, practice, practice.

RAKING

Keep your legs wide and use a lunge motion to pull the rake toward you, rather than just pulling with your arms. It is okay to bend a little to get closer to what you are raking but keep your back straight. As you move to your next section to rake turn your whole body to face what you are raking, rather than reaching across your body and twisting.



SHOVELING

Shift your weight forward as you start to dig then shift your weight to your back leg to lift the shovel. Stand close to your shovel and over the top of it if you are digging straight down to get better leverage. Once you are lifting up the dirt use your legs to shift your weight back and lift the shovel. As much as possible, lean your weight into the shovel. When it's time to dump out the dirt, use your whole body, and not just your arms and avoid twisting. Twisting the spine while carrying a load such as dirt or snow, and/or while bending forward at the spine are known risk factors for a spine injury.



WEEDING

There are several options for getting down and close to weeds: kneel on one knee, 2 knees, or you can even sit. Weed one area at a time and keep turning your body as needed to face the weeds. Shift your weight forward to reach weeds farther away. Once you are done with a section, stand up, bend backwards a few times, and move on to your next weeding area. Avoid twisting to reach the weeds. Keep your wrists straight as you weed and prune.



CHAINSAW

When using a chainsaw, get as close to what you are doing as possible, squat low and face what you are cutting. Proper protective clothing and eyewear is imperative here.



WHEELBARROW

Squat and lift with your legs to lift the wheelbarrow. Use your body weight as leverage and use weight shifting on your legs and lunging through legs to move the wheelbarrow. Then lean your body in toward the wheelbarrow to tip the contents out.



LIFTING

If picking up something light – you can use a “golfers lift”. Bend forward on one leg, keeping your spine straight and lifting the other leg behind you.



If the items you are lifting are heavy, place the item as close to your body as you can, squat, lift the item and bring it close to your body, then stand up. Reverse the process to put it back down. Ask for help when needed.



PUSHING/PULLING

When mowing or pushing equipment, keep your wrists straight and have a slight bend in your elbow. Shift your weight forward toward the mower and over your front leg, push through your legs as you walk forward. The key is to use your body weight as leverage. Try to avoid shrugging your shoulders up toward your ears and pushing too much through your arms.



When pulling, such as in pulling brush, tie it up in a bundle, pull and use your legs to do the work.



HAPPY SPRING AND HAPPY GARDENING!

*A **BIG THANK YOU** to Amira at Pivot Physical Therapy for contributing this post to our blog.
She did the pictures and everything! GREAT job Amira, **WE APPRECIATE YOU!***

