

Gardening is Beneficial for Health

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



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Gardening activities are an excellent source of physical exercise and vegetable gardens can supply fresh and nutritious food.

All things seem to revolve around the coronavirus outbreak of 2020. Things feel uncertain, surreal and downright scary at times. Working from home with children or caring for family members can make it a challenge to balance professional demands and family obligations with physical activity and healthy diets.

We also need both mental and physical stimulation to relieve stress and relax. As the weather begins to warm up, the urge to

spend more time outside gardening is steadily on the rise.

You can get the American Heart Association's recommended 30-to-60 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic and strengthening activities by gardening. Countless studies have linked regular physical activity with improved joints, increased bone and muscle mass, improved metabolism and immunity to disease as well as enhancing mental health and well-being.

Gardening activities are an excellent source of physical exercise, and vegetable gardens can supply nutritious food. But gardening is so much more than that. It is relaxing; it provides an outlet for stress relief, and it also helps create a sense of belonging and connectedness to others and our planet.

Growing a vegetable garden or tending ornamental gardens and landscapes offers physical activity as well as nutritious, low-calorie





foods essential for maintaining a healthy weight. Benefits are not limited to food gardening. They can come from any type of gardening that involves physical activity.

Tasks such as digging, weeding, raking, planting and staking plants are good exercise for both upper and lower body strength and are considered moderate-intensity physical activity, comparable to a brisk walk, swimming and biking.

Other gardening tasks that use upper body strength while standing or squatting—such as pruning, mixing soil, planting seedlings, sowing seeds, watering, filling containers with soil, harvesting and washing produce—are low-intensity physical activities.

Gardening can also contribute to good health by providing fruits and vegetables for proper nutrition. Produce provides an excellent source of fiber, vitamins and minerals essential to our health.

Households that grow their own fresh produce tend to eat more fruits and vegetables. Children who participate in growing produce are also more likely to try or eat a broader selection of vegetables.

In addition to physical and nutritional health benefits, gardening uniquely provides important benefits to mental well-being. The repetitive tasks of gardening can be

relaxing and offer mental restoration, stress relief, sense of purpose, forgetting worries and focus recovery. Gardening can also enhance the ability to respond and rebound after difficulties, such as stress or illness. That's just what we need in this time of uncertainty.

Gardening can meet our need for personal choice and a sense of relationship to our surroundings. Designing a garden space, tackling a garden project, selecting which plants to grow or even choosing flower colors are examples of personal choice. A sense of pride and purpose results from growing and harvesting fruits and vegetables or from arranging a vase of cut flowers. And success in the garden leads to an increase in self-esteem.

Plants teach us about patience, delayed gratification (a much-needed skill in this day and age) and nurturing. Gardening tasks also teach us work habits and an understanding of what it takes to produce food and help us observe growth and realize what it means to be needed.

Tending the garden offers valuable focused time for our families to converse, share and interact while creating a time for fellowship as well as an opportunity to teach our children about all aspects of our world, life and nature.

Lastly and importantly, the gardens and landscapes we tend offer

community and social benefits. When we share tools, offer growing tips or lend a helping hand, we provide support and connectedness in addition to experiencing pride of place and connections to our neighbors.

Growing plants can make our neighborhoods safer places to live. Routinely taking care of plants gets us outside, talking with others and becoming more aware of our neighborhood, resulting in an increased sense of community and stronger social connections.

So get out there. Take some time away from the headlines and busy hustle and bustle of working from home and teaching children. For those still going to work and trying to keep this pandemic in check when you get home, go outdoors. Take time to mentally recover from all the stress by working and being in nature.

