



Garden **Shape-up**

Getting your garden fit for spring? Get ready for a healthy workout. With all the mowing, raking, tilling, weeding, digging and hauling, the physical demands of yard work can produce multiple fitness benefits. The typical tasks can burn at least 200 calories per hour, work all of your muscle groups and require the same energy as other popular exercise routines.

Even a little gardening can be quite strenuous, especially if you're hopping from the couch to the garden. Be cautious to avoid backache and other strains.

Start small. Plan a maximum 1-hour session per day. Choose different tasks that use multiple muscle groups — and alternate heavy activities with light ones to avoid fatigue.

Before you jump in, warm up. Walk around the garden for a few minutes, and then stretch your back, legs and shoulders — same as you would for any strenuous activity.

Take your time. Rather than weed the entire garden at 1 time, start with 15 minutes. Then take a break and move on to a different task.

Prevent neck and back strain: Limit bending over to 10 minutes per chore, and don't lift with your back (use your legs as well as your core and stomach muscles).

Ease the aches and strains. If pain sets in, rest up, apply ice to the affected area and take an anti-inflammatory medication if needed and with your health care provider's okay.

Have the children or family members join you. Show them the lively, ever-changing nature of gardening. Like you, they may come to enjoy the creative — and physical — side of their efforts.