KINGMAN IS GROWING! Column

Oh, My Aching Back!
By Marjorie Grimes, Kingman Area Master Gardener

It's time to get out into the yard! The warm days have created that irresistible urge to get and get going in the garden. Enough sitting, dreaming, ordering - it is time to begin.

Before we begin to whip our gardens into shape, we should think about whipping ourselves into shape. It may have been a sedentary winter and we may have not done much physical activity.

Before you are outdoors digging, raking, lifting, planting, consider doing several warm-up exercises. A little prep time in the garden pays dividends in a good crop. A little prep time before gardening may pay dividends by eliminating stiff joints, sore muscles and an aching back.

Start with a short walk. Walk around your house a few times. Then gently repeat each of the following stretches five times. Hold all stretches for 15 to 20 seconds. Stop if it is painful.

**Thigh Stretch**

With one hand on the side of your house or a wall, bend your left knee. Reach back and hold your ankle with your right hand. Pull your heel toward your buttocks and hold. Relax. Repeat with your other leg.

**Back Stretch**

Sit on a chair and slowly bend your body forward from your hips. Bend your head and try to rest your palms on the floor. Hold and relax.

**Shoulder Rolls**

Let your arms hang loosely at your sides. Then slowly rotate your shoulders in a circular motion, forward, then backward.

**Wrist Flexion**

Hold out one arm as if you were giving a "stop" signal. Use your opposite hand to hold this position. Hold. Repeat with the other hand.

Here are other suggestions for saving our bodies while working in the garden.

* Vary your tasks. Do a little bending, digging, pruning. Don't overdo any activity.

* Watch your posture. Bend your knees and keep your back straight. Hunching over a heavy load is a disaster waiting to happen.

* Before you get down on your knees, plan ahead. Put all the tools you will need in a bucket or container. Use a knee pad or kneeler with arms. The arms are good for leverage if you have trouble getting up. Many of them turn over to become a bench for a rest after kneeling.
* When you shovel, keep your feet wide enough apart to give your body plenty of support.

* Do not twist your body if you can help it. Reposition your feet instead.

* Use long-handled tools that allow you to work sitting or standing.

* Try a reaching tool to pick up litter. This saves you from the constant up and down movement when cleaning the garden.

* A garbage pail on wheels can be rolled around with you to save you steps. A hand-held bag on a pole could be used.

* Put hanging baskets on pulleys. You can lower them for easy watering and maintenance.

* Try to use lightweight pots. If you use clay pots or large pots, put them on a platform with wheels. You can move them easily.

* If you have a large garden, having an extra set of garden tools is a good idea. You can keep one set of pruners, a trowel, clippers, a ball of string, etc., near the house and another set at the far end of the garden. Hopefully, what you need will always be close by.

* A mailbox can serve the same purpose as a plastic container or bucket to hold small hand tools. If mounted on a pole, this could be the perfect height for reaching from a wheelchair. Mailboxes come in a variety of styles that can complement your garden or you could decorate one yourself.

* Place stools, garden chairs, benches, or boulders at strategic places in the garden. You can sit and admire your handiwork.

* You can buy a garden cart to carry long-handled tools. But a plastic garbage pail on wheels works just as well and is cheaper. The wheels are on just one end so the can stays in place when you stop. The tools are handy and don't fall over in the garden.

* If your arms and hands are weak, use lightweight tools. Hand tools with a large grip are easy to use.

* Add foam tubing to handles to soften the grip.

* Try hand tools that have an ergonomic design. This is easy on your wrist and arm movement.

* Gloves are also good for a secure grip. especially if they have a ribbed surface.

* Have a hose holder part way into the garden so don't have to carry it the whole way.

* Paint the ends of wooden handles a bright color. If you drop them in the garden, they are easy to see.

* Keep spades and pruners sharp to reduce the effort needed to do the job.

Follow these tips and not only will you have a garden in great shape, but you will be in great shape, too!

COME JOIN THE MASTER GARDENERS FOR AN “ALTERNATIVE GARDENING WORKSHOP”, SATURDAY, APRIL 5, 2005, 10:00 A.M. TO 12:00 NOON AT THE MOHAVE AGRICULTURE CENTER, 101 E BEALE ST., KINGMAN. LEARN ABOUT: UPSIDE-DOWN PLANTING, EARTH BOXES, HAY BALES GARDENING, RAISED BEDS, GARBAGE BAG GARDENING. This workshop is free and open to the public, no reservations required.

For more information contact The University of Arizona Mohave County Cooperative Extension at 101 E. Beale Street, Suite A, Kingman or telephone 928-753-3788.

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